

re-inventing the black box theatre

mi suk lee
december 2010

Submitted towards the fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Architecture degree.

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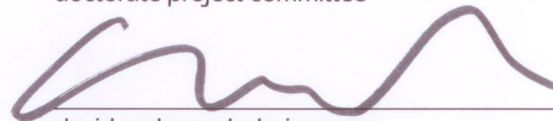
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*We certify that we have read this Doctorate Project and that, in our opinion,
it is satisfactory in scope and quality in fulfillment as a Doctorate Project for
the degree of Doctor of Architecture in the School of Architecture,
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.*

doctorate project committee



david rockwood, chairperson



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abstract

I propose the creation of a Re-Invented Black Box Theatre on the premise that the current black box theatre is no longer living to its fullest potential as a small intimate theatre. This Re-Invented Black Box is a space where audience, performer, and dramatized subject is successively integrated with the external world. This type of theatre is an attempt to utilize elements of the original Black Box Theatre – the level of intimacy between audience, performer, and drama – and synthesize it with mediated levels of outside influences and environment. As a result, this will cause the audience and performer to be keenly aware that the drama presented has no independent reality in some fantasy world. By doing this, the mind is kept in the present with full analytic faculties to determine solutions for correlative problems that might actually exist in the real world.

The architecture of theatre is key in determining the rapport with the audience, the perception they will have, and the level of critical engagement they will have with the material presented. Currently, the delineation of the audience and performer via the elevated proscenium, changing stage props, and darkened theatre hall creates a perfect environment for the audiences' mind to slip into a fantasy world. The creation of the more intimate 'Black Box' theatre, was designed to remedy the 'psychic' distance between audience, performer, and the drama being presented. However, this evolution still remained ineffective to a certain degree, since the darkened room and intimate black box theatre hall separated the audience, performers, and drama from the external reality that existed in the outside world. Such isolation of the entire theatre experience still allowed the audiences' mind to slip into a distant fantasy world, where the mind cannot completely disassociate real from performance.

Most importantly, however, this means that this proposed Re-Invented Black Box Theatre has both new utility and new aesthetic contributions and value to theatre, architecture, and the society for which it comments upon.

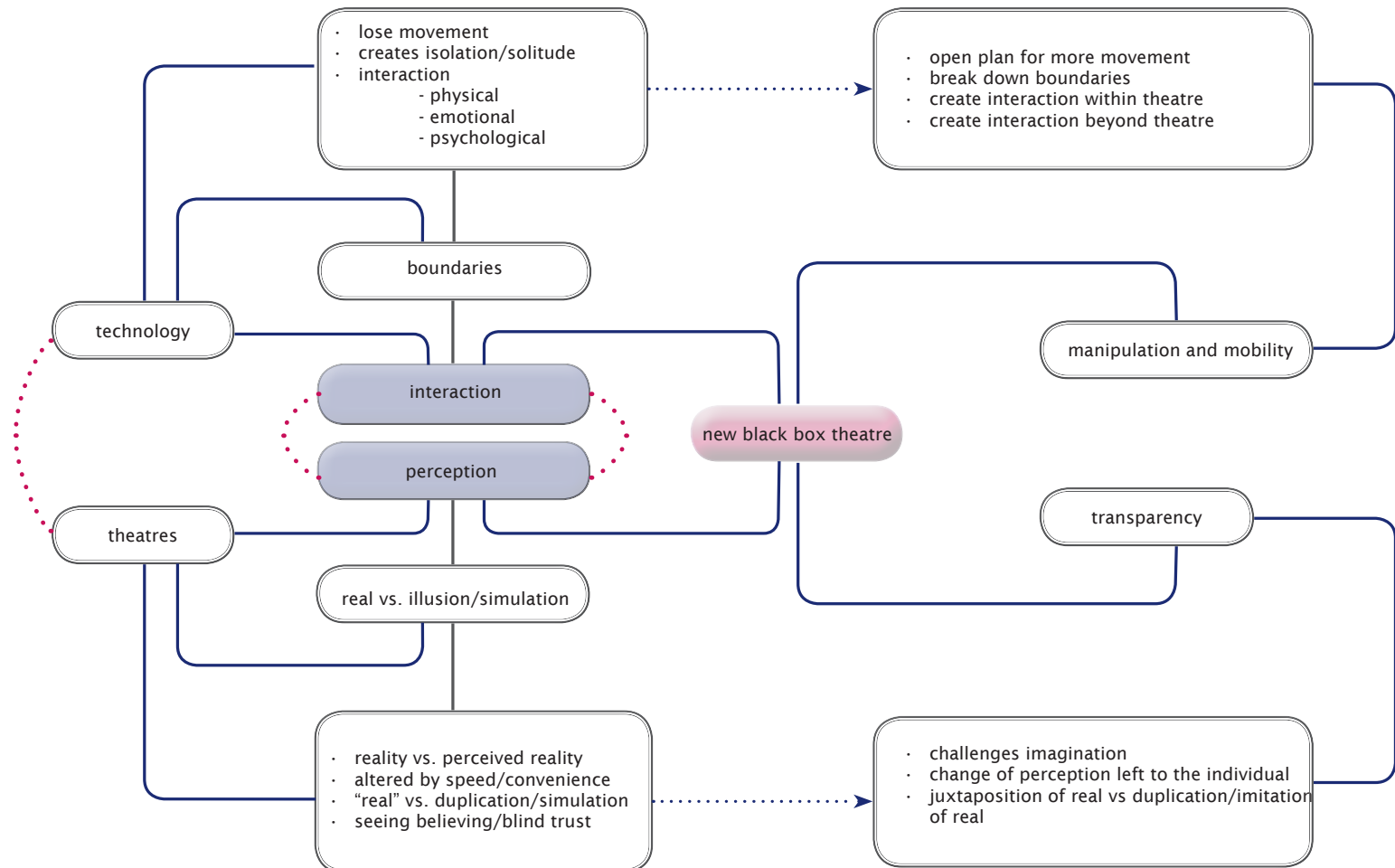
methodology

This research centers around the architecture of theatre - how various configurations of theatre affect the interaction between performer and audience, and how their perceptions of the performances are altered by the effects of architecture and technology. This is largely determined by the physical boundaries established by the theatre's architecture and settings, which in turn creates the mental parameters of the audiences' belief –the level of acceptance of how 'real' is the fantasy of the drama being presented, and the emotional and psychological distance/involvement the audience has with the subject matter presented.

My focus is on obtaining the most 'genuine' interaction and perception between performer, audience, and drama. By this I mean, a creation of a performance space that maintains the traditional theatrical intimacy found in theatres like the black box, but also having the openness and integratedness of having an open-air stage. Through the research I discovered that outdoor venues allowed for a more critical observance of the performance as it did not take the audience out of present reality and into a fantasy world.

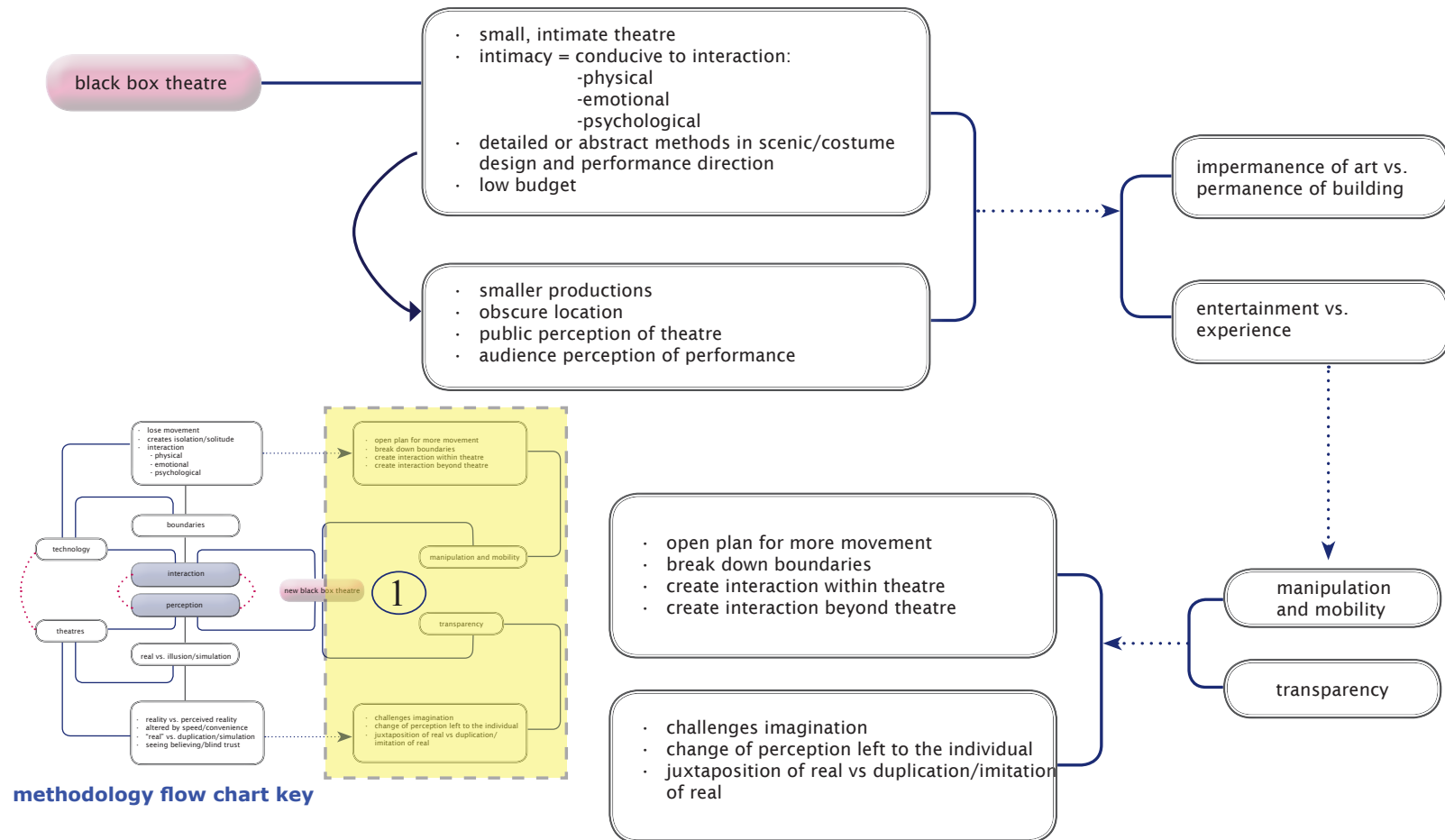
The following flow charts and diagrams give a graphical explanation of this paper and the research behind it.

methodology



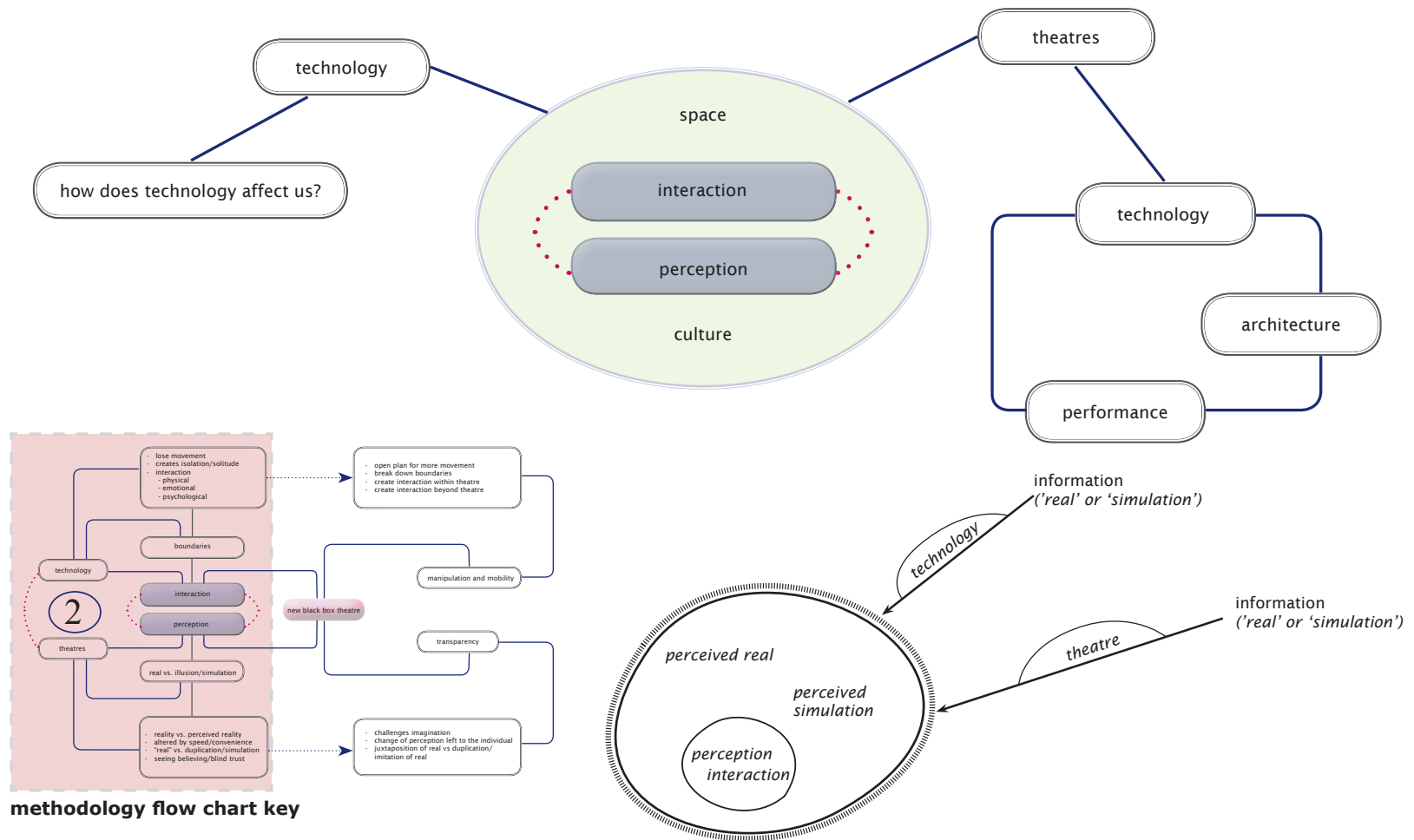
This diagram shows that *interaction* and *perception* are the main threads that follow in the research and the design portion being the *new black box theatre*. These threads hold together the ideas of *boundaries* and the *real vs. illusion/simulation* that affect and are affected by *technology* and *theatres*. The larger bubbled points are observations and ideas studied in the research on the left-hand side; the corresponding points on the right are ideas to implement in the new black box theatre design portion by *manipulation & mobility* and *transparency*.

methodology



This diagram is a more defined explanation of the ideas behind the black box theatre today to explain conclusions for the Re-Invented Black Box Theatre on the right side of the methodology flow chart [as shown in key]. Concerns that I saw existing in the current black box led to the design solution of manipulation & mobility and transparency to counter those concerns.

methodology



The diagram above is to mainly express the relationship between technology and theatres in terms of interaction and perception, also where space and culture are inherently affected. On the right, it shows that technology does play a role in the how the theatre changed over time, along with architecture and the art of performance. The final goal then is to see how we can take the history and apply it to how technology is affecting us today to determine the issues of today's theatre and to find design solutions for the Re-Invented Black Box.

introduction

project statement

Theatre is an artistic representation of everyday life.

If we perceived life to be less 'real' or 'accurate' than what it actually is, what would that mean for theatre, our experiences observing life, and the artistic representations thereof? With the advent of new media and technology, and its unique ways of communicating and interacting with the user, life is perceived and directed in a fragmented and isolated manner. As these new developments have largely taken over our entire everyday lives, technology is becoming a part of us in a way that technology is defining us more than we are defining it.

Technology may have helped people become more connected in many respects, but it has also caused people to become disconnected in others. Through media, human interaction has become convoluted and lost in translation, exhibiting the actual disconnect within the process of communicating between sender, audience, and technological medium. On the other hand, interaction between performer and audience within theatre happens to be more 'real', because the audience is able to witness human beings interact in the flesh, and contextualize the communicative process, setting, and process of the performance. Therefore, in order to accomplish this the setting of performance needs to be a more intimate venue, where the audience has the opportunity to have a closer and organic communicative experience. Today it is the black box that provides the closest option to achieving this.

This project began with an investigation into the nature of black box theatre as it exists today; however, in order to understand the nature of modern black box, we must first understand its origins and reasons for creation. What was happening in the theatre that eventually concluded the black box to be the designed solution?

The urban fabric, society, and the world has changed drastically in the past few decades with the growing population and aid of technology. Everyday life consists of a contradiction between individuals in isolated cubicles and unavoidable crowds at social venues like the theatre. How do we perceive the built environment then, and what do we conceive as a possible solution to the built environment as a balance between the solitude and social interaction?

The black box, as a venue for performance art, is an entirely different playing ground as opposed to the traditional orthodox theatre and the film house. In order to reinvent this black box theatre, there should be an understanding of how it differs from the other two, and how it can be even further distinguished and unique. This reinvented black box shall be a place for live performance, offering the intimacy and unique experience situated in a real place and time.

Today's black box has its own limitations. The open plan is telling of the black box's intent to be able to transform into anything it wants to be, but today, the black box falls into conventions similar to those of the orthodox theatre; even without the traditional proscenium, participants in the black box are separated by similar boundaries. For example, the conventional seat is a boundary, separating audience members from each other; or the manner in which we light the stage keeps actors and audience apart. As theatres in history have reacted to audience's expectations, which reflect hugely the social conditions of those times, the black box must do the same today. Boundaries must soften in social settings, such as the theatre, to balance those that confine us into solitude driven by modern technology—the car, the desk, the computer, the cubicle, the couch, the television, and so on.

man vs. bits

technology and how it affects our minds

Marshall McLuhan introduced the idea that “media is the message” in 1964; in short, that the medium played a bigger role in people’s perception than the content relayed in its respective medium.¹ Thus the medium can and will have a bigger affect on our social construct than the content itself. At the time McLuhan had spoke of this concept, he may have been referring to things like the telephone, radio, or television; but this idea, still echoes today in modern forms of computer technology, entertainment, and through the proliferation of the internet and online media.

Nicholas Carr concurs with McLuhan stating, “As our window onto the world, and onto ourselves, a popular medium molds what we see and how we see it—and eventually, if we use it enough, it changes who we are, as individuals and as a society.”²

A personal experience may help illustrate this point. Recently, I wasted thirty to forty minutes of my life on Facebook, reading a long and horrendous argument between random people that left comments regarding a controversial letter posted on several web sites (which was supposedly originally published in a local newspaper).³ One letter (an editorial regarding the health reform bill) turned into this hateful argument between people everywhere with some people identifying themselves and some not. What may have seemed to be a simple letter stating the author’s opinion on an issue became an anger-inducing virus on the Internet. What is more disturbing about this letter is that I had to wonder if any of these “bloggers” ever stopped to think that this letter may have been just a hoax in the first place? Do people think that everything they see on the Internet is real? Critical thinking skills are compromised reading internet literature, since society is so often habituated into trusting the written word, and used to often seeing electronic media as entertainment,

1 M. McLuhan et al., *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (California: Ginko Press, 2005), 7.

2 N. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York:W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 3.

3 M. George, “Dr. Starner Jones—Racist of the Week”, <http://activerain.com/blogsvieview/1374274/dr-starner-jones-md-racist-of-the-week> (September 2010)

not something to be actively critical and analytical about.

The Internet provides a place for discussion between people of different backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, races, gender, and so forth. However, it seems the problem is that the meaning a person is trying to convey can be incredibly misconstrued by the audience he/she is trying to communicate with. The medium is limited in a way that does not allow the nuances of personal communication to come through – the tonality of voice, the emotional inflection of the speaker, and the facial expressions of the communicator. Such limitations of the latest technological media has caused modern communication to be much more ineffective, void of genuine emotion, and apt to more misunderstandings.

Seeing is believing...There is nothing in the history of the species which aids our basic senses in understanding that imagery can be altered in distance. Without training in sensory cynicism, we cannot possibly learn to deal with this. It will take generations to let go of our genetically coded tendency to soak up all images as though they are 100 percent real. And think if we do manage to do that, what will we have? Creatures who cannot believe in their senses and who take everything as it comes, since nothing can be directly experienced (1984).⁴

Photoshop and Wikipedia are two examples of this issue of “seeing is believing.” Photoshop images of models and actresses in magazine spreads, have made them appear “perfect” in the eyes of viewers who place them on pedestals, not understanding the computer software’s capabilities and its ability to alter the appearance of bodily imperfections. The human body is never completely symmetrical or blemish-free; however, computer programs give the ‘illusion’ that physical perfection exists. Wikipedia is another concern that is commonly accepted as a genuine database of facts when in reality it is actually a peer-based storehouse of unmediated information, some of which are academically credible and others that have no solid support.

4 J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: HarperCollin Publishers Inc., 1978), 246-249.

The Internet is the medium of concern today as television was to McLuhan and Jerry Mander well over thirty years ago. Mander is the founder of International Forum on Globalization in 1994 and author of many books including the *Four Arguments For the Elimination of Television*. Mander makes the argument that people are driven so visually that we assume (with blind trust) what comes on the television is true, not understanding how much editing and other work went behind it. The success of today's reality shows is evidence of this point. People want to see real people dealing with real drama, but "real" is becoming more and more subjective, as the "real" on such shows are done for the sake of drama; real-life moves much slower without such frequent drama occurring so rapidly and inundating every moment.

At my practicum experience at Callison, an architecture firm based in Seattle, I had interviewed several employees about how they communicated in the office. My main purpose of the interviews was to see how technology—in various forms from the phone to email to video-conferencing—affected how people communicated and how it all ultimately affects the office structure and profession. Through these interviews with the employees (of various titles and lengths of experience), it was also made clear that the physical office setting was changed due to the advance of technology. It was common to hear that email was considered very efficient but not the preferred method of choice to communicate with dialogue. Natural dialogue comes with face-to-face interaction, whereas an email can seem so contrived, and can have part of its meaning lost behind the cold of the medium. In addition, probably the most impersonal aspect about email is that the other person can always choose not to read it, or selectively choose what he/she wants to read, possibly missing out on very significant details that need proper attention.

Several of my interviewees stated that even the phone was not enough to really discuss important issues. Video-conferencing was a great tool, considered by those who use it frequently as the closest thing next to face-to-face discussions; however technical glitches were pretty common, thus also causing communication issues and possibilities for more misunderstandings. Through my preliminary research, my findings reinforced the idea that people have an instinctive need

to have real contact with another person and no matter how useful technology can be in its efficiency, nothing is going to replace face-to-face interaction as the method of choice for communication.

In the theatre, interpretations can vary as well. The interpretation, however, is made after observing more information than just words. There is voice in performance art, emotion, expression, and energy - all of which you cannot get on a computer screen. You can choose not to go to a performance but once you are there you cannot avoid watching what is performed, and the subtle nuances that are embedded within the context of the performance. Such richness of human characteristics and interactions present in actual theatre cannot be compared with technological media displays of similar performances. There is just too much more contextualized meaning in an actual theatrical display. The mind is forced to pay full attention and engage with everything presented, both in a critical and personally imaginative manner.

The Internet allows us to pick and choose what we want to see every second. With a click of a mouse, our attention can go from watching a one-minute clip of a news program on the war, to a photo gallery of the worst and best dressed gowns at the latest awards show. When faced with fifty new emails a day people often pick and choose which to open, which to read completely, which to read at all, and which to respond to. In effect, this inundation of information takes away from the powers of attention of the viewer to focus on the subtleties of human interaction and communication, as exemplified in the performance. With attention of the audience disseminated in an unfocused fashion, the Internet disengages the audiences' critical and imaginative mind in the theatrical experience. This eroding of attention span is made up for in movies, documentaries, and other media through special effects, CGI, and faster sequences to keep the viewer engaged. Whereas, a slight pause in a theater monologue may draw the audience to think emphatically about what the actor maybe thinking or feeling in the scene, the same pause in movies and such may bore the viewer. The capacity of the technological user to want to imagine what the actor is thinking/feeling is made inactive

through constant technological stimulus and constant barrage of images that leave the mind's concentrative powers unable to grasp and form adequate human emotions according to each image put on the screen.

People are changing into a "Google state of mind" as Carr would put it. Quick searches for quick finds, and Youtube is another evidence that people's attention span for entertainment is also shortening. Also, many web sites have a barrage of short clips of television shows and movies, lasting no more than a couple of minutes each. There is a commitment of time and attention that goes into attending the theatre. Live theatre in general requires presence of body, and the black box theatre, in its intimate setting, requires presence of mind to enjoy the performance.

technology and space

Technology has already changed the way we design space because we are beginning to *understand* space differently. This is not just in terms of how we use space, but simply how we see it. Technology has affected the way we conceptualize space – to the degree that it is difficult for many designers to think of a design then and illustrate it freely without the aid of computer program. Many current designers are not skilled in manual drawing and thus rely on technology to tangibly bring a 2-D image to 'life' from abstract ideas.

This does a number of things that affect how we see space. First, let us establish that drawing tools like AutoCAD are just that—drawing tools. Let us then take a look at “design tools” such as 3D StudioMax and others alike. These design tools are only as effective as the user and what the program is capable of. One can only dream up a design as well one can use the software—this is if a person starts and ends the design process with it as his/her creative outlet. For architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Les Corbusier, the act of drawing by hand affected his understanding of space and of the object.

His concern in other words was not so much with recording the surface appearance of an object, with a picturesque rendition of a phenomenon, but rather with drawings as a means to become “passionately involved,” that is, to enter into a kind of intuitive communion with the object...The entire drawing looks to have been done in minutes, spontaneously, capturing the scheme as a scheme, noting its essential elements, arranging its critical in relationship to the theme of the ramp, indicating basic shapes of curve and cylinder, and beginning thoughts for the vertical relationships of functions ...⁵

5 I. Fraser and R. Henmi, *Envisioning Architecture: An Analysis of Drawing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 2, 10. Authors analyze Le Corbusier's methods of sketching; the authors refer to a quote from Jacques Guillon's *Ideas of Le Corbusier* and later describes their analysis of Le Corbusier's early sketches of what was to become the Visual Arts Center at Harvard University

Hand drawings can also teach the designer about the space by understanding shadow, light, distance, texture, proportion, and movement. When we use the computer to focus a light on a building designed in the computer, we let the computer figure out how the shadows are cast, how the light travels through space and how it lands on the building and space around it. Hand drawing, not computer software, is what cultivates our awareness of such spatial and proportional nuances as it relates to the external environment.

As for how technology affects the utilization of space, let us take a look at the architecture firm as an example. I have visited several architecture firms, and have noticed the odd use of space that is contrary to what you would think an architecture firm would be like. Architecture is always in various degrees a collaborative profession; however, the isolating cubicle dominates the architecture firm's landscape leaving backs turned to backs and faces focused and hypnotized on the screen before them, thus reducing them to a quasi-mechanistic automaton.



Figure 1: Callison Architecture office in Seattle

From my interviews with some of the more senior employees of Callison, several of them mentioned that the office culture and environment has changed significantly over the years with the introduction of Computer Aided Design (CAD) softwares. In pre-CAD times, drawings not only took up a lot of space but it forced people to be more involved with each other and communicate more on a day-to-day basis. With the aid of technology, one can see what the other is doing at another desk, another floor, or another office around the other side of the world. People do not need to physically be in each other's presence anymore to work on the same project and its drawings.

William J. Mitchell, with a background in architecture and urban design, argues optimistically that we can live in a boundaryless globalized world with the aid of the internet in his book City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn. Although one cannot deny the wonders of what kind of information is available via the Internet and its ability to transcend oceans and continents of boundaries, it did not totally eliminate all communication restrictions. In the example of architecture firms such as Callison, the boundaries of the global macro scale were replaced by the micro scale limitations of the office and work desk. A person can communicate with as many people at any given point, across various parts of the world, but that person is then bound to his/her computer or cellular phone – and yet, it is a singular event. Imagine two persons side by side in a room; they will often interact with another remotely via the computer than with each other.

Mitchell further suggests that we can extend our lives and communities on the Internet. "This unprecedented, hyper extended habitat will transcend national boundaries; the increasingly dense and widespread connectivity that it supplies will quickly create opportunities – the first in the history of humankind – for planning and designing truly world-wide communities."⁶ Keeping in mind that Mitchell had first published this book in 1996, he had incredible foresight in what the possibilities could become. Some examples of these communities and virtual "locations" in cyberspace that exist today are Second Life or social networks such as Facebook. Yes, possibilities may be endless in cyberspace, but they can also very well be meaningless and/or artificial. Cyberspace phenomena have a certain degree of abstraction that

6 W. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 167.

often times do not actually correlate well with real and present cultural sensibilities. For instance, many social network participants believes that their networks are actual 'friends' that truly know and care for them as well as long time friends they've had actual experiences with. Mitchell's assertion that it extends life and community is not completely accurate; it may extend it virtually but NOT necessarily physically, as such relations remain indeed superficial.

Everything we learn in architecture has so much to do with actual place, the culture, and understanding the local contexts. We are taught that these things shape architecture and urban design. These are things that are also learned and imbedded much deeper into our senses through experience, rather than merely learning via reading or watching short clips or documentaries of unfamiliar places. For example, Gregory Burgess' Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre would not be considered so successful if it weren't for the intimate interaction he had with the aboriginal community for a month in Australia during his research and design process.⁷ We may be able to design without context, but does it have an inherent value? A "cyber-architect" who uses Second Life or other virtual worlds similarly can design and "build" the most far-fetched skyscrapers, but how can we give it value? Can it really be built and with what technology and materials? Who uses it and what is it for? These are just a few questions that require answers when putting value on a place or building, and these are values that distinguish architecture from art.

However, these values are irrelevant when it comes to these virtual communities because no one is really living in them - there is no human element to contextualize the landscape and building in relation to the environment. Relative to the world's population [6,876,249,184 billion people as of October 20, 2010, 10:45 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)]⁸ there is a very small amount of people who are actually part of this community. According to a blog on Second Life, the num-

7 S. Rab, "Rooted modernity: reconstructing memory in architecture," in *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter*, ed. Sarah Menin (London: Routledge, 2003), 269-270.

8 <http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>

ber of active users or “Residents” reached just over half a million in March of 2010, which is supposedly its all time high.⁹

Mitchell also proposes the idea of seeing the world without ever leaving the comfort of our home. A virtual tour of a place will never have the same impact as actually walking through a building. He gives a scenario:

In a virtual museum digital images of paintings, videos of living organisms, or three-dimensional simulations of sculptures and works of architecture (perhaps destroyed or unbuilt ones) stand in for physical objects, and a temporal sequence on the display plays the role of a spatial sequence along a circulation path. This yields tremendous spatial compression; a huge collection can be viewed, exhibit by exhibit, on a personal computer or in a small video theater. Sprawling gallery spaces become unnecessary.¹⁰

However, physically moving through the space is part of the experience of perceiving the artwork? Take for instance the New York Guggenheim by Frank Lloyd Wright where one has to move through a ramped sloped gallery, affecting the perception of the art and equally affecting your experience. Moreover, you cannot fully appreciate such work as Claude Monet's and other impressionists without seeing the details of every brush stroke. In terms of architecture, it is very concerning if people were to ever replace real experience of visiting a building or place with a virtual imitation of one. I cannot imagine that a virtual walk up Machu Picchu, or through Angkor, or the view at the top of the Empire State Building can ever replace the real thing.

9 <http://blogs.secondlife.com/community/features/blog/2010/04/28/second-life-economy-hits-new-all-time-high-in-q1-2010> [blogger T. Linden, Apr 28, 2010 9:30:36 AM, “Residents active in the Economy reached 517,349 in March, a 2010 high”]

10 W. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 59.

In terms of the theatre experience, Mitchell proposes that the theatre experience can now be not only satisfied but more interactive with the aid of technology. I agree with Mitchell in that interaction between audience and performers does not exist in the realm of television; but I do not see how an audience stationed at home tuned in and aided by an interactive video program can replace the experience of going to the theatre and watching a live performance.

Electronic enlargement of the spectator circles had an additional important consequence; since performers could no longer hear their far-flung audiences laughing, groaning, muttering, hissing...the flow of information became almost entirely unidirectional. Direct engagement of performers and audiences disappeared, to be replaced partially and unsatisfactorily (if at all) by expedients such as studio audiences, telephone call-ins, and Nielsen boxes....Live performances—broadcast, narrowcast, or point-to-point—can also become interactive. You might, for example, have a very literal kind of virtual auditorium in which the display screen functions as a stage and your remote has buttons for sending back applause and other codified responses.... So the social superglue of necessary proximity between performers and audience is losing its old stickiness, and the traditional architectural types and social conventions (going to the theater, cheering for your local team in the ballpark) that we associate with performance are coming unstuck....Soon, all the world will be an electronic stage.¹¹

Mitchell does not address the relationship between audience and performers in live theatre at present day. In terms of the theatre experience, Mitchell proposes that the theatre experience can now be not only satisfying but more interactive with the aid of technology—he does not make the distinction between live theatre to televised entertainment. This method of interaction he speaks of may be the answer in certain types of performances, (especially in television), but

11 W. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 62-65.

television did not kill the practice of live performance and the tradition of theatre going. What can be done to further interaction in live performance theatre? As I will explain further later in this paper, creating a higher level of interaction between audience and performance is a goal in re-inventing the black box, which was what the Environmental Theatre was about in the 60s.

conclusion

Modern technology today has created many kinds of boundaries. Though the world has become more globalized, we are becoming more closed off from our direct neighbors. With email and cyberspace venues like Second Life or Facebook people can feel more empowered to express themselves freely. However, this tends to internalize people's thoughts and corrupt social behavior because thought and expression are highly uncontextualized without the proper social setting. Responses, actions, or reactions are only as immediate and fluid as the device, venue, or person manipulating such allows them to be. One can be completely open in cyberspace with anonymity on their side and sometimes abusing the situation to say what he/she would not normally verbalize if facing others in person.

People get sucked into this convenient existence watching life happening on their computer or television screen as voyeurs sitting comfortably in their seat at home; when they choose to, people interact with someone else out there in cyberspace and every once in a while they will actually meet in person. Interacting with people in cyberspace is not the same as interacting in person. How can people connect with each other on a more personal level through a computer screen of timeless space, short phrases, acronyms, emoticons, and cartoon versions of ourselves?

Technology is not an entirely bad thing, as it provides us with convenience and the ability to connect with other parts of the world. However, people need to have more personal human contact to have genuine life experiences. We have the tools to be more informed across the globe in the most expedient manner than anyone could have possibly imagined when the first personal computer had been available nearly thirty years ago. We have the world available to us at the request of our fingertips on the keyboard, flashing brightly before us on a little screen as we sit in our comfy chair at home, office, or at the nearby café when we feel a little more social.

The individual, finally, is decentred in a sense from himself. He has instruments that place him in constant contact with the remotest parts of the outside world...The individual can thus live rather oddly in an intellectual, musical or visual environment that is wholly independent of his immediate physical surroundings.¹²

Though we have access to an abundance of information, there is no regulation to the way it is presented, packaged, and perceived. Is this information real and unfiltered, and how selective are we about what kind of information we choose to see, hear or absorb? In this new theatre, I hope for it to be a place for theatre goers to experience the performance and information presented in a more integrated, unfiltered fashion. A captured audience in an environment such as a theatre cannot, at the click of a button, stop the information from being received. However, the audience can be isolated from the external environment in such a way that the presentation has no actual correlation with anything relevant in actual reality. The goal of this new theatre is to make theatre much more relevant to the audience by involving elements of the external world with elements of the actual performance which has its own sphere of story. The context shall be distinguished and perceived in contrast to the external environment.

I am not proposing that this new theatre is the panacea to solve attention deficit problems. However, theatre is a great avenue where one can be entertained, told a story, and then given a chance to reflect afterward. Thus theatre can be used as one way to counter and balance the speed and artificiality of technology. It can be a place where one can be part of a real experience that is more than a fleeting technological moment, yet also provide a space where one can negotiate the events of ordinary life and find solutions through the dramatized performances. This third reflective space (independent of performer and audiences immediate reactions) is highly significant, especially in the greatly modernized society where everything moves so fast and the individual finds difficulty in finding solutions to problems or

12 M. Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), viii.

has no opportunity to really contemplate the challenges of everyday life. Theatre is important because it provides this reflective space, but also dramatizes such situations in an entertaining, non-threatening manner, which would otherwise offend, hurt, or make people uncomfortable if discussing the issues among varied audiences.

the theatre's role

theatre and everyday life

Performance art, like other types of art, is a form of self-expression that tries to establish a connection with another person witnessing it. Performance art was a way to pass on stories, educate society, and also functioned as an integral part of rituals in many cultures including the Greeks, that used performance during ceremonial celebrations honoring gods such as Dionysus. In many other cultures, knowledge of gods and legends were passed down orally through performance art. The usage of performance art to dramatize and perpetuate everyday life, and culture concurs with the famous quote from William Shakespeare that “all the world's a stage”; that all of life can be dramatized subject matter.

The purpose of theatre is not much different than reading a book. We read books to understand other people's lives or thoughts, to escape into a different reality, or sometimes to understand our own reality through someone else's perspective. Sometimes we read a book or story to learn “life's lessons.”

Can theatre have value divorced from everyday life? Everyday life is the meeting ground for all activities associated with being human —work, play, friendship and the need to communicate, which includes the expressions of theatre. Everyday life is thus full of potential— it is the ‘everyday’ which habitually dulls sense of life's possibilities. Theatre, when it is good, enables us to know the everyday in order better to live everyday life.¹³

Another interesting aspect about theatre is the ability of the story to be interpreted differently by all people involved in the performance - the audience, director, actor, stagehands, and so on – all simultaneously during and after the event. There is a community of unique, free thinking minds that may all think and feel differently about the performance. Furthermore the community is drawn closer in discussion (post-performance) about the story and the quality of the show.

13 A. Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life : An Ethics of Performance* (Florence, KY, USA: Routeledge 1995), 1.

When one reads a book, it is a solitary event where the story is only read and understood by our own perspective and biases and without the human element to give active life to the story. There is something unique in theatre in which a person is allowed to 'look through someone else's eyes' and have a deeper understanding of the story and a person's feelings via a dramatized performance. In the same way when one watches a play or a movie, it helps one to understand a part of life, a part of his/herself purging out thoughts and emotions as a catharsis of some sort. Sometimes one can identify with a character in a play. Through the outcome of the story, people can purge their own feelings about a difficult situation and perhaps even realize a possible solution.

"Aristotle also made some remarks on the desirable effects of tragedy: that it should bring about a purgation (katharsis) of pity and terror...It has usually been assumed that when Aristotle speaks of purgation, he is referring to the audience: by watching the enactment of tragic happenings on the stage, they are purged, vicariously, of undesirable and unhealthy emotions in themselves. A variant, and more modern, view would argue that Aristotle is referring to the actor, who effects a purgation in himself by acting out the misfortunes of others. Or perhaps Aristotle is saying that the character is purged by recognizing his error."¹⁴

14 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 84-85.

In many community type theatres, dramatic performance can be used as a therapy or way to cause awareness about various social issues. In Community Theatre: Global Perspectives, there are examples in which drama is used to empower women and educate the youth in Kenya.¹⁵ Or there are those community theatres that spread AIDS awareness, such as the examples given in Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa by Byam.¹⁶

Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal used theatre as a way to educate and cause political and social awareness. Brecht and Boal used theatre as a didactic tool as well as a vehicle for entertainment – with similar results of 'katharsis' as Aristotle mentioned. By witnessing the performance of issues in a fashion meant for entertainment, the audience was allowed to engage with the issue in a playful yet critical fashion, possibly allowing for psychological and emotional healing in the process.

15 E. Van Erven, *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001), 185-186, 192. *Van Erven describes how the Sigoti [tribe] people use the theatre for various reasons; later the author transcribes an interview of a leading member of The Kawuonda Women's Group describing how theatre is used to educate the youth of old traditions.*

16 L. Dale Byam, *Community in Motion: Theatre for Development in Africa* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1999). *Byam describes in Chapter 3 how a performance group in Zimbabwe uses community theatre to educate others on the topic of AIDS.*

live performance vs film

Regardless if form or function comes first, there is undoubtedly a relationship between the two that make up architecture. If there are different types of performance, then architecturally, there should be different types of theatres. The main sensory stimulants that different types of theatres have in common are that of visual and audible in regards to the audience's experience. In live performances, the same stimulants can affect the performers as well as the audience; unlike the situation in film houses where the audience are passive observers. The film house is a simple space, the most basic out of the three theatres composed of the auditorium and of course the screen against wall. This is all the film house requires to display its show. The audience's reaction, whether disinterested or engaged, is irrelevant to the performers, whose performance was recorded earlier. There is no interaction between the two parties.

Thus, when we examine the theatre text more closely, we find that it is characterized by the peculiar conditions of spectatorship that exist in the theatre, which greatly differ from those in a cinema and from the circumstances of watching television at home. Guided spectatorship draws attention to the shared aspects in order to arrive at the unique characteristics which make up the art of theatre, most particularly, of course, the fact that it is a living communication between actors and audience in a shared space. The special quality of the actor-audience relationship in theatre spectatorship, as well as the social circumstances and components involved in a theatrical gathering, constitute important motives for theatre-going.¹⁷

17 D. Hanbrook, *On the Subject of Drama* (London: Routledge, 1998), 148.

reel experience vs real experience

Film is another product of the modern world where a boundary exists between audience and performance. Film is in "reel-time,"; a pre-existing performance and passed occurrence like a memory. More than that however, it is like watching someone else's memory that you had no part in experiencing. Film is static and frozen unlike the theatre experience, which is much more dynamic and expressive. A film shows the same thing to very different persons of very different times and places, and it will still be the exact same performance. In watching a live performance, a certain level of uniqueness exists knowing that any two persons, of different places and time will not view or experience the exact same thing. No two performances are exactly the same. Even two performances with the same actors, same set, and same lighting will vary performance to performance. This is a dynamic and human experience, whereas the film implies perfection and the audience may not be fully aware of all the takes and editing that went into a single performance.

The sense of danger, of community and of shared experience felt at a successful theatrical occasion is what distinguishes live theatre from cinema. And yet, paradoxically, for much of the twentieth century cinemas and theatres have borne a superficial resemblance one to the other, the screen having evolved as the canvas which was thought of as filling the picture frame of the theatre proscenium.¹⁸

18 I. Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1993), 2.

According to French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, we are living in a complete *hyperreal* existence.

The very definition of the real has become: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction...The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: that is, the hyperreal...only because it is entirely in simulation.¹⁹

If the hyperreal is something that is a simulation of something that has already been reproduced, then film as well as live theatre is a direct example of this. But if reproduction also implies duplication of something, maybe this is where the theatre can have a chance to be “real.” If we can take the same play but place it in a different setting which does not attempt at being a duplicate of a previous existing place, can we then call it a real happening?

We can further separate film and theatre by defining what is art and what is reproduction. Walter Benjamin describes the difference through the actor's role in front of a varied audience type. The actor's performance in both scenarios is a work of art in itself; however, the actor in theatre carries out his single performance in front of a random audience whereas the film actor performs in front of a group of experts, such as directors, lighting designers, and others alike. These experts then intervene and conduct the performance; this intervention is carried out to the end of the process in which editors produce a “work of art produced only by means of montage.”²⁰ The end product as a film then is a reproduction on various levels: each take is a reproduction of performance; each scene is a reproduction of each chosen take; the final body of work is then a production of reproductions that can be again reproduced. Benjamin

19 J. Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983), 146-147.

20 W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008), 29-31.

describes it to be the “first art form whose artistic character is entirely determined by its reproducibility.”²¹ The beauty of film is that it is a moving collage that can be endlessly edited and reconfigured to have a different tone to the story. Whereas in theatre, the wonder is in the impermanence of it all—everything happens only once in that specific way.

²¹ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008), 28.

the orthodox vs the black box theatre

We should then recognize the different use of spaces between large orthodox theatres and intimate black box theatres, the use of space characteristic to each, and the relationship of performers to their audience in each distinct venue. Although live performance theatre does tend to imply interaction of some sort, this is not always the case in a large orthodox theatre. Psychoanalyst Dr. Donald M. Kaplan describes what is intriguing about the live theatre and with respect to the physical, architectural circumstance:

It is my sense that a theatre enlivens the executive and visceral musculature in a kinesthesia of separation and interaction. The interface of stage and auditorium is not a celebration of a maturational achievement, as certain other architectural forms are. A theatre reminds us of a dynamic condition. It beguiles us into postures of hope and trepidation.²²

If interaction is defined as a mutual, reciprocal action or influence, then the interface of stage and auditorium as Kaplan puts it defines separation more so than interaction. The audience can be moved by the performers in any case, but in a large theatre where the audience is engulfed in darkness and obscured by distance, can the performers really interact with the audience? I have seen a number of plays where a performer will speak directly to the audience, or asking for a response at times; I have also seen children's theatre plays where volunteers are asked to come on stage to do something. In many cases, the only interaction between audience and performers in a large theatre is the traditional applause and bowing at the end of the performance. This is not to say that the large orthodox theatre is not special and unique; the large orthodox theatre does have its own functionality and place in performance art. There is a sense of magic that comes with seeing a live performance on a great stage (with or without audience participation) designed as a place in the world or beyond—a simulation, but still very real in that it is happening right in front of you.

²² Theatre Architecture: A Derivation of the Primal Cavity Author(s): Donald M. Kaplan Source: The Drama Review: TDR, Vol. 12, No. 3, Architecture/Environment (Spring, 1968), pp. 105-116 Published by: The MIT Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144357>.

In a small intimate theatre such as the black box, the close proximity is the start of a unique close relationship between the performers and audience members. Performers on stage in a small theatre have the challenge to be precise of facial expression and body language. The design of the environment has to either be incredibly precise as well or very abstract. The subtle nuances of human communication, verbal and non-verbal, become more significant, and the audience – even more so for a modern audience overly stimulated and mentally disengaged by drama shown on current technological media – become highly immersed and challenged to more mentally and emotionally connect with the character and the situations being dramatized. The element of 'human-ness' that comes with everyday face-to-face interaction becomes much more genuine and more accurate in representation for the audience viewing the performance.

Kaplan discusses in other parts of the article that the experience of the theatre is attributed to perception rather than behavior of theatre participants. Passive physical involvement does not necessarily equate to heightened experience; he says, "The provocation of behavior suppresses the possibility of perception, and, as I shall show later, it is perception, not behavior, that shapes experience."²³ I do not necessarily agree with Kaplan that physical engagement does not help shape the experience—how can it not?

He gives an example of a cabaret-like show where a performer touches and speaks directly to an audience member and claims that this does not necessarily "involve" the audience more. It does not necessarily make the performance any better or worse, but I do not see how it cannot - even for the moment that the audience member is being spoken to or touched - be cause for more involvement. In addition, touch may also be just the right sensory stimulant to alter someone's "perception" of the play, the actor's character, or even the audiences' sense of place and time.

²³ Theatre Architecture: A Derivation of the Primal Cavity Author(s): Donald M. Kaplan Source: The Drama Review: TDR, Vol. 12, No. 3, Architecture/Environment (Spring, 1968), pp. 105-116 Published by: The MIT Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144357>, pg. 109.

For example, I went to a show at the Earle Ernst Lab Theatre called "Black Box Black Blocks," which was actually a collection of short dramatic performances and dance numbers. One dance routine was a burlesque style number in which the dancers engaged the audience members in the front row physically. [Though cliché] as it was simultaneously awkward, embarrassing, and laughable, I cannot say that it did not affect or not help "shape" my experience of attending that show. When there is someone in your face, touching you and forcing you to be a part of the show as the spotlight is on you, it is directly shaping your experience.

Another example of physical involvement shaping an audience member's experience can be seen in the play *Dionysus in 69*, performed at the Performing Garage theatre in New York. Audience members were encouraged to be a part of a couple of scenes in the play, which always changed the experience for them, the performers, and the audience members who did not participate. Richard Schechner, co-founder of The Performance Group, speaks of a young man who watched the play five times, and participated as a character on the fifth attendance when the actor who originally played the part got unexpectedly carried off by a group of audience members to the street.

The opportunity for authentic interaction with the performers made it true that *Dionysus* was not an orthodox play (that is, a finished, a self-contained event) but life (an organic, unfinished thing, an open event).²⁴

Richard Schechner also makes a reference to Kaplan's understanding of the relationship of audience to performance. Schechner makes an analogy of this relationship that Kaplan describes in which the audience members are "digestive guts seated in the darkened auditorium" who hungrily waits for the "food chewed and fed from the brilliantly illuminated

24 R. Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1994), 43.

stage (mouth)."²⁵ When we take a look at the development of theatre's architecture and practice from ancient Greek times, we will see that there was much more interaction and that the proscenium was in fact a "maturational architectural achievement" as Kaplan expressed.

The following diagrams graphically describe the level of interaction that occur in the three types of theatres just discussed. This interaction can be understood by observing the size, movement and light. The study of the size clearly expresses the distance between the farthest audience member in the auditorium to the performers, expressing the lack of interaction. The study of the light was to express how light can be a form of boundary in the whole space, separating audience and performance. In studying movement of space, one can begin to see possibilities and impossibilities of interaction in the theatre inside and outside of the auditorium between performers and audience.

In Figure 3, the circle on the left side represents the actual object or actor on stage in its actual size, and the circle(s) on the right represents the perceived view of said object or actor from the farthest point away from the stage. Although the film has the ability to give the audience a wide range of views, from extremely close to very far, the interaction is very static and unidirectional as the audience are able to see the actors but not the other way around. In the large orthodox theatre, the audience member's connection to the performance is only as close as the proximity of their seat allows. In the intimate setting of the black box, actors are more inclined to be softer but more detailed in their expressions and movements as audience members are close enough to notice details.

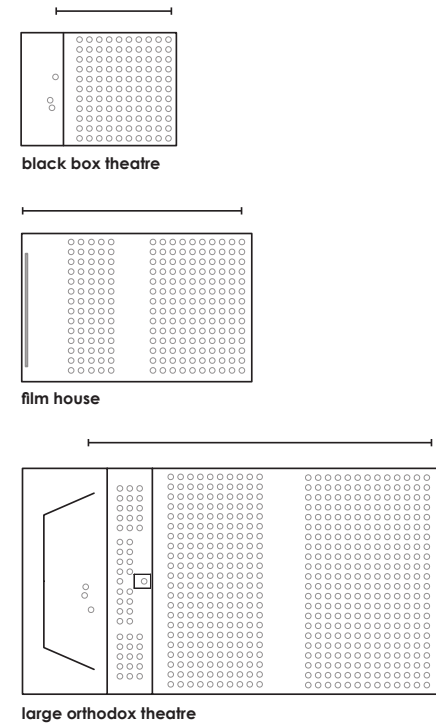


Figure 2. Distance

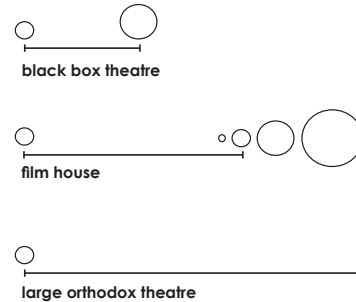
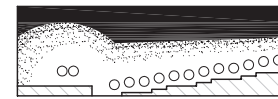
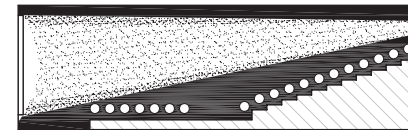


Figure 3. Distance, comparison of views

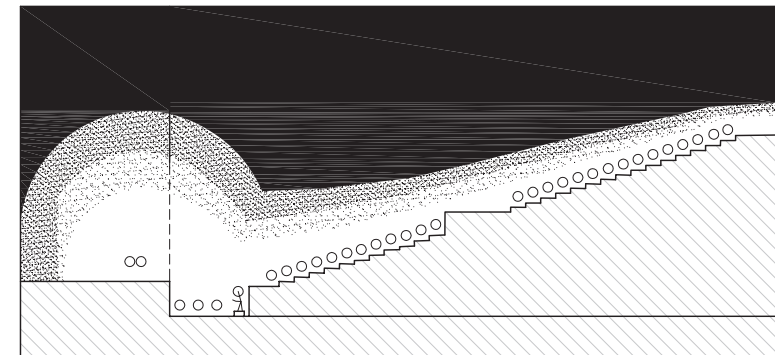
Figure 4 was a study of light as a boundary. It occurred to me that darkness can restrict interaction, allowing audience members to become “lost in the performance.” In the case of the orthodox theatre and film house, most of the space is drowned in darkness; with most of the light focused on stage or the screen, it draws all focus there. The stage light cannot help but permeate into the audience almost completely at times in the black box theatre. The light appears to do the same in the orthodox theatre. Also, in some situations in the black box and orthodox theatre the light can be a boundary to the actors as it often can be so intense that it drowns out the audience.



black box theatre



film house



large orthodox theatre

Figure 4. Light as boundary

Figure 5 describes typical movement defined by the architecture and culture of theatre. This is not describing any particular movement in any point in time; it is simply the nature of how people, actors and audience move through the space. The film house show complete lack of interaction between audience and actors as no actors exist in the same space. The orthodox theatre has an added breakdown of space as there are completely separate entrances into the auditorium from the pit to the upper level or balcony spaces. The black box clearly shows here the potential for chance interactions in and outside of the main auditorium space.

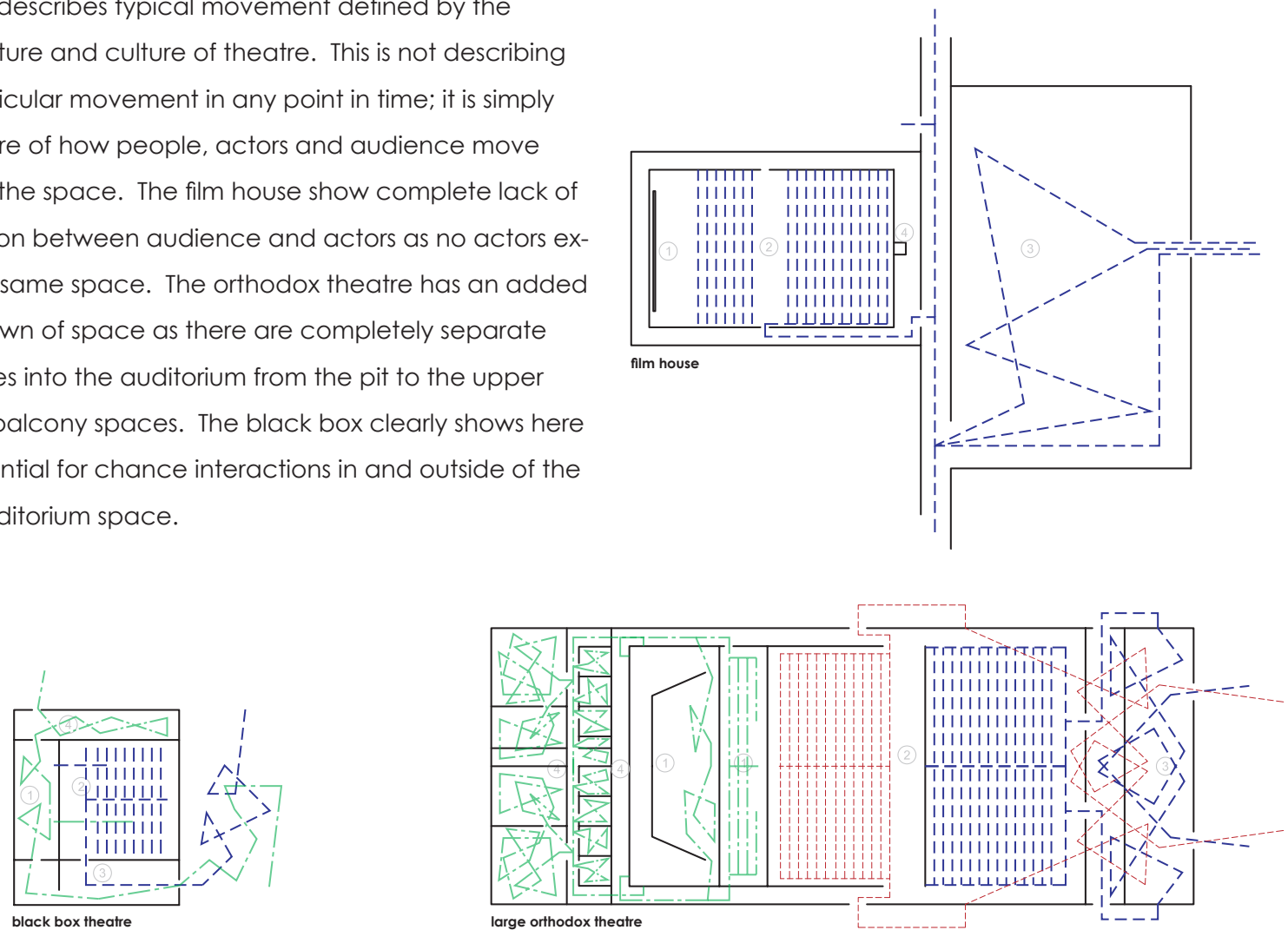


Figure 5. Movement: green lines represent actors movement; the blue represents audience members; the red represents "privileged" audience members

history of theatre in brief

Peter Arnott, professor at Tufts University makes no separation between architecture and the social, political, or economical conditions that shape the theatre of the respective time.

...the earliest forms of drama that we know all seem to have been by-products of other activities...In any culture where the theater has functioned as an adjunct of the religious, political, or even educational establishment, it has been at least tolerated and often cherished.²⁶

The importance of seeing the theatre change in history is to see how the architecture and the practice evolved over time with respect to cultural and social changes. The Western theatre is the focus in this project as the roots of the black box has been suggested (though no traceable history has been found) to have come from New York in the 1960s to challenge the art as it was practiced in the orthodox theatre. The Athenian style of Greek theatre from mid-fifth century B.C. is the orthodox theatre's earliest predecessor in practice and architecture.²⁷

26 P. Arnott, *The Theatre in Its Time, an Introduction* (Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1981), .

27 C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 12.

greek theatre

Ancient Greek theatre went through five main phases in architecture and practice: the Minoan; pre-classical, or pre-Aeschylean; Athenian or Attic; Hellenistic; and the Greco-Roman.²⁸

During the centuries when Greek civilization developed and reached its peak, the theater as a concept kept pace with contemporary social and cultural developments. This occurred because it enjoyed widespread popular appeal, having been directly and closely interwoven with religious worship and the way of life of the people.²⁹

The theatre was simple in architecture in the Minoan theatre suspected to have been used for contests and ceremonial rites. Theatre of Knossos and Phaestos are examples of the Minoan style dated approximately somewhere between 20th and 15th centuries B.C.³⁰ They were small sections of the overall palace grounds, respectively, and somewhere on the site of the theatres were a shrine or altar of some sort. Of the two, one can only guess which came first as we can observe the shape of Phaestos (Figure 8 & 9) being closer to the trapezoidal shape seen in the pre-Aeschylean theatre (Figure 10). Although they were not truly what we would call theatres, it is interesting how these spaces shifted from being small separated areas with very limited seating to the classic Athenian theatres which were open and accessible to many.

28 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 12.

29 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 10.

30 P. Cailler and D. Cailler, *Les Theatres Greco-Romans de Greece, Style No. 1* (Autumn 1966), cited in C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 11.

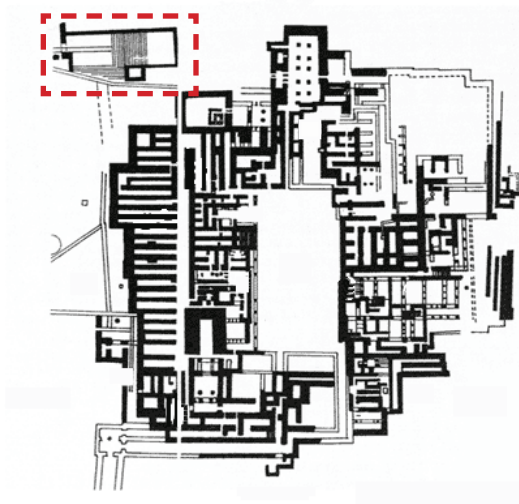


Figure 6. Map, Palace of Knossos
<http://www.explorecrete.com/Knossos/knossos.html>



Figure 7. Palace of Knossos
<http://bleon1.wordpress.com/2010/07/20/the-palace-at-knossos-crete/>

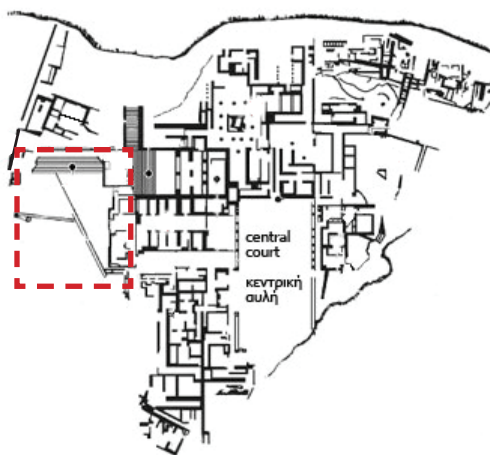


Figure 8. Map, Palace of Phaistos
<http://www.explorecrete.com/archaeology/phaistos.html>



Figure 9. Palace of Phaistos
<http://www.justgreece.com/crete/history.php>

Though there are no findings of the pre-Aeschylean theatre, it has been assumed by archaeologist Emil Reisch and archaeologist/architect Wilhelm Dorpfeld that these theatres were trapezoidal in shape with wooden benches surrounding the orchestra space.³¹

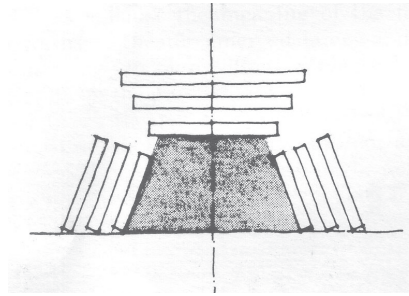


Figure 10. Pre-Aeschylean theatre
(drawing by C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

When the Greeks developed the theatre as performance art in the Western world as we know today, it began as a method of paying homage to one of many gods Dionysus. This was the classic Athenian theatre which is the closest origin in typography to the traditional orthodox theatre. Theatre began with what was more of a ritual as part of a larger ceremony in which a number of dancing chorus members sang odes or hymns in honor of Dionysus called *dithyrambs*. A man named Thespis from Icaria in Attica is believed to have been the lead of this chorus who invented acting by assuming the role of a character in a performance.³² He is also credited to be the first to wear a mask³³ which is an important element of ancient Greek theatre. Using paintings on vases or kraters as a clue to theatre practice of that time, the other chorus members often did dress in costume as animals, maenads or satyrs.

31 C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 12.

32 J.M. Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1980), 35-36.

33 J.M. Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1980), 36. Author notes that dates, c. 536-534 B.C. are based on the register of victors at the Great Dionysia amongst other scriptures.

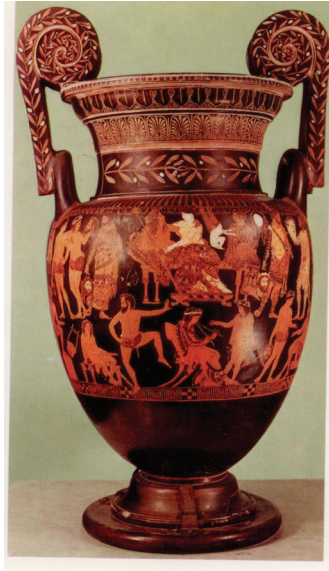


Figure 11. Volute krater, credited to painter Pronomos at the end of the 5th century B.C.
(C. Molinari *Theatre Through the Ages*)

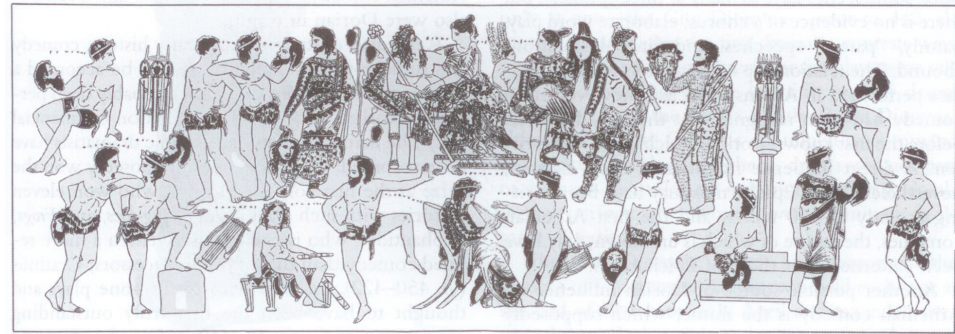


Figure 12. Volute krater, unfolded
(O. Brockett. *History of the theatre*)

The concept of the mask is intriguing and gives insight to the practice of theatre at that time. A single actor may have played more than one part; and as only men appeared to have the actual acting parts, it was also necessary to use masks when he (the actor) had to play female roles. Due to the size of the amphitheatre, seating over 10,000 people, the masks also helped those seated in the back row identify the different characters.³⁴ The use of masks may have had pragmatic reasons, but masks took on a more philosophical purpose as well. Actors wore masks to make a statement that there is a separation between actors and characters; the actor was to never be confused with the god or gods he was playing. There was a definite intent to separate illusion from reality.

34 S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 9.

...By the same token, the masks held by the actors are the product of fantasy...The power of the mask's gaze is one of the most important facets of the mask that we must relate to the realities of tragic performance. The satyrs dangle or handle their masks casually and without apparent reverence, and it is the effect of the mask, not its material substance, which defines it as a sacred object.³⁵

The mask was just the tool and not the art that moved the audience. The art was more the story and the actor's ability to use speech and song to express the character. "The performance did not depend on scenic effects; it was based on austerity and plainness of meaning and speech."³⁶

The built environment of the theatre of the time was also key in this attitude of separating reality versus the performance. Though the original intent may not have been to do this, there was no desire to block out real life things (landscape or the temple beyond) until much later in the Athenian period. The Theatre of Dionysus is one of the main theatres to analyze the development of the architecture along with its practice. The chorus performed on the level plane called the orchestra, meaning "dancing place," that surrounded an altar. The theatre was not built so much as dug out from the side of the Acropolis with the temple behind the acting space and the landscape beyond as the backdrop behind the staging area.

35 D. Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31-32)

36 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 13.

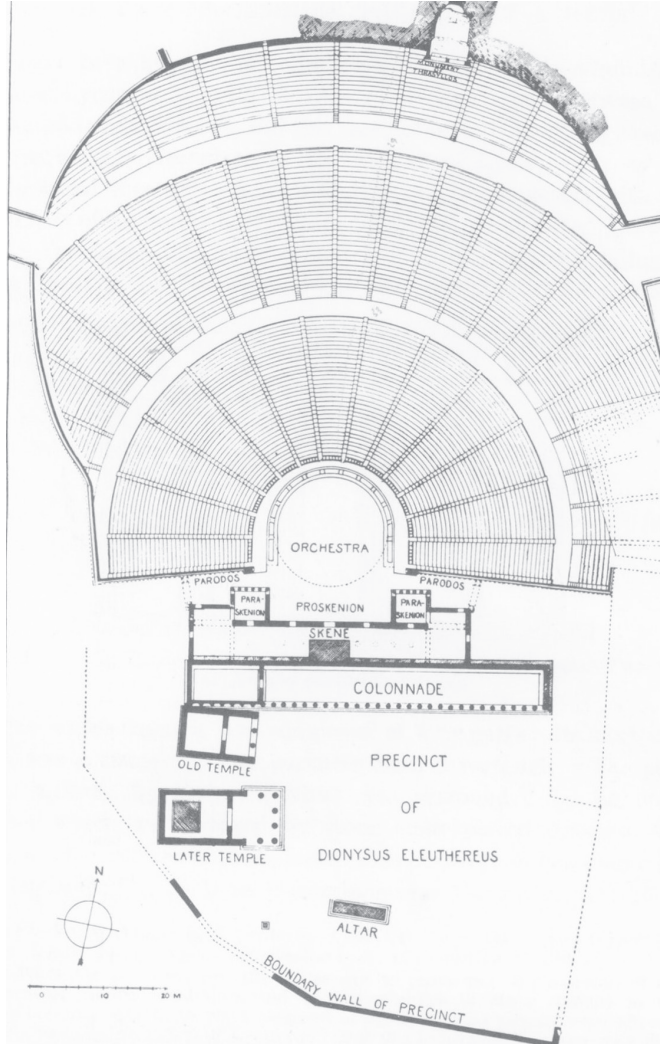


Figure 13. Theatre of Dionysus, plan view
 (James, Turney Allen. *The Greek theater of the fifth century before Christ*)



Figure 14. Theatre of Dionysus, Acropolis, view of landscape beyond
 (http://www.domnik.net/topoi/commons/GR/attica/athens/acropolis/04n_dionysus_theatre1.jpg)

Going further forward in time, we can observe changes in architecture, the art of performance, and social needs practices; more importantly, we see how they all affect each other.

With the chorus no longer part of the drama, the full orchestra was not necessary. As theaters were rebuilt, therefore, the orchestras were truncated to a semicircle, diminished in size, or impinged upon by a deeper, higher stage on one side and extra seats for privileged spectators on the other. Skene buildings became more elaborate, decorated with columns and statuary.³⁷

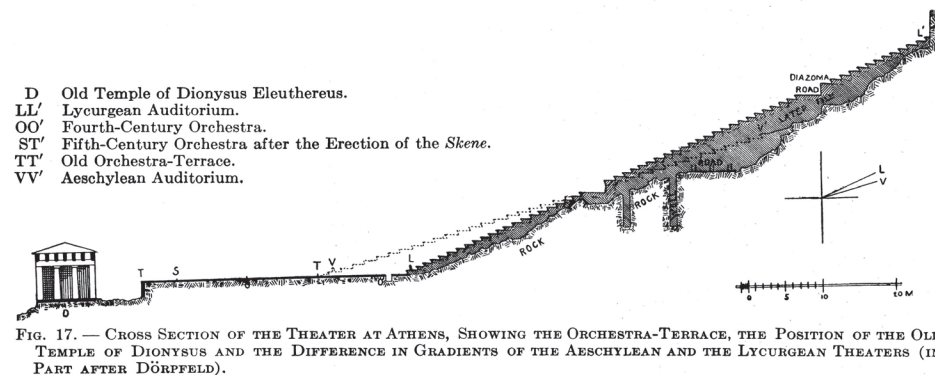
It was much later from the presumed start of 'acting' that a more elaborately designed skene appeared. From the single actor that evolved from the lead chorus, playwrights added more actors into their script. Eventually, the plays became more descriptive of how and from where these actors appeared on stage, thus requiring a more protected and elevated stage area. The skene became a built-up "backdrop" and the distance between the actual temple of Dionysus and orchestra area grew allowing for the skene to become the imaginary temple or palace façade and the orchestra became the area in front of the building.³⁸ However, at the start of skene's maturation, it was still a very abstract structure; I make this point to illustrate that the separation of illusion or imitation and reality still existed, though more subtle.

37 P. Arnott, *The Theater In Its Time, An Introduction* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company Limited, 1981), 78.

38 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 17.

The skene was an improvised wooden structure, and the decorative designs were purely geometric and symbolic. It was only after 425 B.C., during the last quarter of the fifth century, that the skene, though still made of wood, became a somewhat more permanent and elaborate structure, erected on a marble or stone foundation.³⁹

With the slow deletion of the chorus in the Hellenistic period in the fourth century B.C., the skene developed further as the orchestra area grew smaller. When you see the Athenian theatre such as Dionysus, the extent of the orchestra space was to accommodate a large choir's movement of dance and song. Also, it was closer to the end of the Athenian period where the proscenium developed, fronting the skene. This proscenium was an elevated stage between the skene and orchestra space that stretched between two projecting wings with walls sculptured and decorated on the audience side. Prior to the introduction of the proscenium, actors entered straight from the skene's doors onto the orchestra; the proscenium at this point became the acting space, delineating a boundary between actor and chorus and of course the audience.



Note in the section of Dionysus the shortening of the orchestra space, bringing forward the audience and distancing the skene building from the temple.

Figure 15. Theatre of Dionysus, sectional view
 (J. Turney Allen, *The Greek theater of the fifth century before Christ*)

39 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 17.

During the Hellenistic period, stories began to depict human characters rather than gods. This may be attributed to the influence of foreign cultures due to Alexander the Great.⁴⁰ Playwrights such as Euripides began to place the chorus into much smaller secondary roles in performance and eventually left the chorus out of scripts completely. “The chorus disappears altogether. So do the gods, mythology and contemporary politics.”⁴¹ This caused for the actors’ roles to become much more essential in telling the tale. Hence, one can see how plots had to be more complex and actors became literally more active as the chorus was no longer being used to emphasize the dramatic points of the story. Of course, there came change in the architecture as well.

The principal architectural change concerned the scene-building itself. Whereas previously all the weight and importance was given to the orchestra exclusively, in the Hellenistic theaters the scene-building was perhaps the only area to undergo thorough conversion.⁴²

By the end of the Hellenistic period, around the second century B.C., it is believed that panels of painted scenery were fixed between a row of columns fronting the proscenium.⁴³ The theatre at Priene (Figure 16) illustrates how the skene building may have looked like with these painted scenery panels.

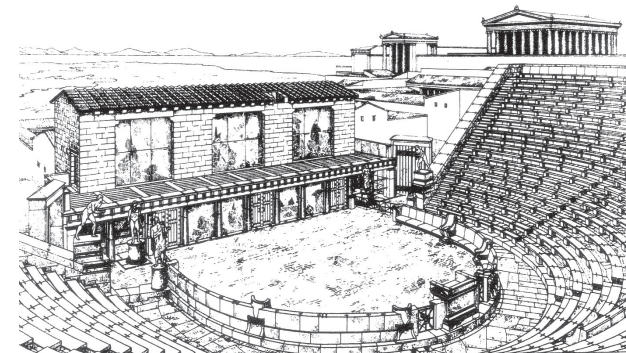


Figure 16. Theatre at Priene
(S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History*)

⁴⁰ C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 21. Author suggests that Alexander the Great’s movement throughout the region had affected the Greek culture of that time.

⁴¹ S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 18.

⁴² C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 23.

⁴³ S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 20.

It is evident from the floor plan of the Theater of Eretria, which dates circa 441-411 B.C. (Figure 17) is that the skene-building was beginning to resemble today's "backstage." It should also be noted that the skene-building had been typically constructed of wood, and it was not until around 200 B.C. that skene buildings were thought to be made of stone.⁴⁴ Although there are some exceptions, many of the theatres were getting smaller in terms of seating capacity; where the old Theatre of Dionysus could fill over an estimated 10,000 citizens, theatres like the Eretria could fit up to an estimated 6,300 and Theatre of Delphi (Greco_Roman theatre) up to 5,000.⁴⁵

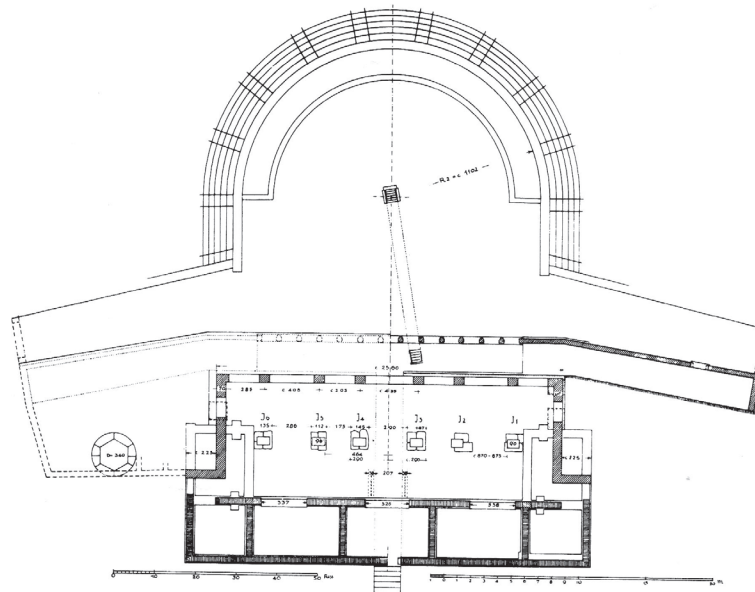


Figure 17. Theatre of Eretria
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

44 S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 19-21.

45 The Ancient Theatre Archive: A Virtual Reality Tour of Greek and Roman Theatre Architecture. <http://www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/home.htm>

As its name suggests, theatres during the Greco-Roman period served as a transitional time where theatres showed influence of the Romans and later became the direct link to the proper Roman playhouse.⁴⁶ Architecturally, there are a couple of significant changes. One modification was made to the skene building which moved a bit closer towards the audience into the orchestra area, breaking the circular shape in plan and increasing the depth and size of the proscenium (Figure 18). The corridors are also done away with between the orchestra and the audience tiers leaving the first row of seats to bank directly against the orchestra.

Note that the audience seating went from an enveloping plan to a 180 degrees layout against the skene; this 180-degree layout will be much more strict in the Roman theatre.

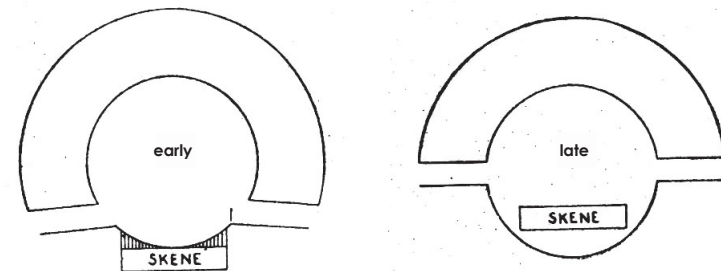


Figure 18. Diagram comparing basic Athenian to basic GrecoRoman plan
(J. Turney Allen, *The Greek theater of the fifth century before Christ*)

During this Greco-Roman time, there were also social implications on the theatre that was much more significant than from the Athenian period. Theatre started to become more exclusive as it was gearing towards entertainment rather than a religious ceremony or tradition. The Roman influence also had a lot to do with the social implications of the theatre as the disparity between social classes grew and as theatre started to have much more to do with everyday people (characters) than it had to with common religious figures known to all classes of people. Although there was difference of social class recognized even in times of Pre-Aeschylus theatre (the upper class had the closer seating and chairs as opposed to benches), the size of the theatre shrinking alone is a huge indication that the theatre closed itself off to the greater public.

⁴⁶ C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 26.

Variety and showiness were indispensable attributes of the play, a sign of the changing social attitudes of the times...It catered no longer to all classes of society but only to a certain portion of the urban community. Its size and seating capacity shrank...⁴⁷

It is here where the theatre started closing up, architecturally and socially; and as we will begin to see in the Roman Theatre, the enclosure and exclusivity led to much more grandeur in the theatre. The skene became more elaborate as the performance became more complex; ironically, although this seems to have been due to wanting a more realistic dramatization, I think it did the opposite. There developed a method—a method of entrance for the actors, methods of movement across the stage; along with these new methods of movement, the skene becoming a permanent enclosure and the chorus removed, organic movement was lost. In the diagram below, one can also clearly see the audience movement changing and becoming much more rigid and separated from each other. Then there were the machines and devices used for simulation, which not only changed the perception of the real versus imitation, but it also changed the expectations of the audience and the direction of the theatre's purpose. The purpose changing from a ceremony which involved everyone to a stylized performance that involved a few to entertain the many.

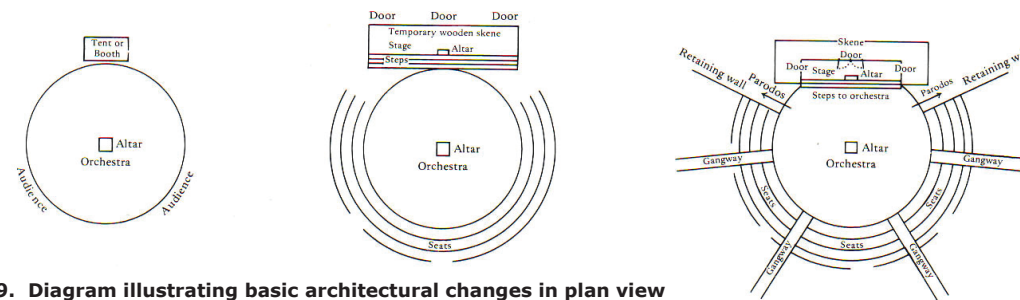


Figure 19. Diagram illustrating basic architectural changes in plan view
(P. Arnott, *The Theater In Its Time, An Introduction*)

47 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 29.

machines and devices

The art of theatrical representation is thought to have been introduced as early as the fifth century B.C.⁴⁸ These machines are interesting in that some exist even today—in some modern form of course. The main reason for taking a look into these machines is to see how they are linked to the development of the skene building which also has a connection to the change in theatre practice, audience expectation and perception of the performance, and of course, the architecture. Most knowledge of these machines and scenic details are given by Vitruvius (Roman architect, engineer, writer in first century B.C.) and Julius Pollux (Greek scholar and writer in second A.D.)—though many clues of the theatre stage set up is given in the written work of the playwrights themselves.

The *periakti* were revolving three-sided vertical panels, each panel with a scene on them. Though not certain where it was located, it is believed to have been used in the doorway of the *parodi* that stood on either side between the skene and the audience tiers. These were also used as entrances for the actors besides the doors of the skene.

The *eccyclema* was a moveable platform, best used to roll out a “dead body” after a murder scene implied behind the skene. Sometimes it may have been used to wheel out an imitation of a throne of some sort to indicate an interior scene.



Figure 20. Periakti, drawn by C. Athanasopulos
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

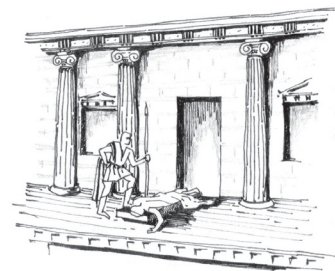


Figure 21. Eccyclema, drawn by C. Athanasopulos
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

48 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 29-31.

Simply called the *mechané* (machine), it was a basic pulley system contraption used to lift someone to “heaven” for example. There two things to note here. One, the base of this crane-like machine seems to have been hidden behind the skene, which is telling of the connection between the development of the skene and the machine, regardless of which idea came first. Second, the contraption is telling of how perception and expectation may have been starting to altar in the theatre audience—illusion and fantasy becoming a more common trend in the theatre practice.

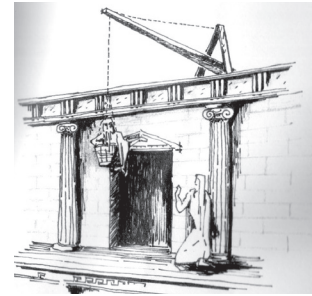


Figure 23. Mechané, drawn by C. Athanasopoulos
(C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

Other tricks of trade then included trapdoors, *anapiesmata*, that were thought to have been in the orchestra area. There was also a type of periakti which had lighting bolts painted on them and with it a thunder-making device made up of a copper tray and a jar of pebbles.

There is an incredible amount of architectural work that were produced under the Roman administration (the later end of the Roman Republic, second century on and the Roman Empire) with theatres spotted across the Mediterranean and into Asia. To express dominance and power the Romans who had conquered a vast Empire built incredibly elaborate and often monumental theatres. The Roman theatre was very political as they were used for propaganda to gain the adoration of the public. Though large arenas such as the Colosseum may be considered a type of theatre, this portion on Roman theatres will focus on those that were built for the art of drama rather than sport.

roman theatre

First of all, the Roman theatre in art and architecture was heavily borrowed from the Greeks. This is no surprise since the Greeks, as they spread and conquered, brought their appreciation for theatre with them. Theatre (as Tragedy) was introduced in Greek settlements of Southern Italy; the Theatre of Syracuse is known to be the oldest dating back to about 460 B.C.⁴⁹ It should not be a surprise then that when the Romans gained their power they were anti Greek culture and ideals.

Ancient Rome had an incredible number of festivals celebrated with theatrical events. "At the time when Augustus turned the republic into an empire, there were 76 public holidays a year, and 55 of these were feast days celebrated with theatrical spectacles."⁵⁰ Theatre in a way has always been entertainment in early Greek times, but as it was tied to religious ceremony and had literary value, it was still taken a bit more as a serious art form. To the Romans, the theatre did not hold the same value to them as it did the Greeks, suggested by the many farces on Greek tragedy by the Romans.

The architecture speaks for itself as to the difference in what the theatre meant to the Romans as opposed to what it meant for the Greeks. Athanasopulos makes an interesting suggestion with a diagrammatic comparison:

A cardinal principle of the Greek theater was that the spectator's area 'embraces' the orchestra, the acting area, thus functionally uniting the one with the other; the Roman theater preferred this relationship to be a confrontation. The action was placed opposite the audience, not among it. The two functions were separated.⁵¹

49 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 129. *This date is not consistent with other sources as to when the earliest Greek theatre was introduced in Italy; but it fits the time line the most accurately as Bieber does make a reference to the early Greek colonies ruled by Hieron I in Syracuse, Sicily around 480 B.C.*

50 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 35.

51 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 37.

Where the Greek theatre suggests a more connected relationship between audience and performance by the concentric layout, the Roman theatre layout tells a very strict separation of the two. Early Greek theatres may have seated a large amount of people, which makes it questionable as to what level of interaction there was between audience and performers. Be that as it may, the concentric layout was a way to counterbalance the separation of the audience by suggesting all components (of performers and audience members) were part of one single unit. This concentric layout suggests dialogue where the straight cut between audience and performance implies a unidirectional mode of communication. We can see this layout working in today's classrooms: the typical lecture hall has even rows of seats facing the "front" where the lecturer stands; and in the seminar type of class, the seats are situated to face each other to encourage discussion.

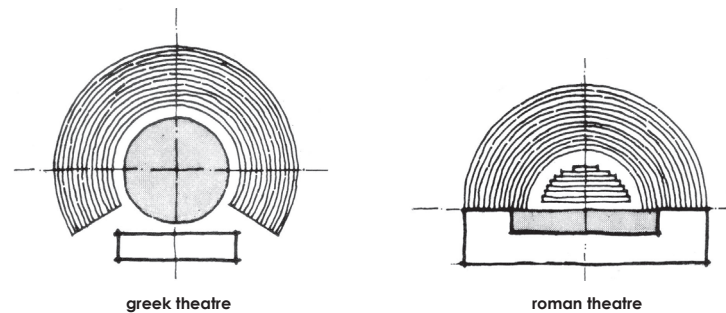


Figure 24. Diagram contrasting the Greek to the Roman theatre, drawn by C. Athanasopulos
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

As mentioned before, it was during the Greco-Roman period that the skene building, *scaenae frons* in Roman theatre, is thought to have begun to be made of stone. The theatre at Segesta, Sicily is one of the main examples of that time. Architectural historian, Margarete Bieber writes:

The Roman love of law and organization created a well-planned whole. The Roman materialis-

tic spirit, their love of pomp and luxury, created the splendid display of architectural triumphs of the scaenae frons which exerted their influence into the Renaissance.⁵²

Prior to Segesta, the scaenae was believed to have been temporary structures of wood, meant to be taken down and re-erected in times of religious ceremonies in Greek tradition. I propose that the permanence of the Roman scaenae frons must be directly connected to the separation of religious ceremony; most in part due to the fact that Greeks built the theatre right alongside a temple, using the temple as part of the scene in performance in Classical Athenian theatre and those prior. With the scaenae having turned into a permanent stone structure, there was a stronger separation between attendees of the theatre (audience and actors) to the outside world. This added to the expectation that visiting the theatre meant to escape into another world rather than a place to celebrate the everyday. The focus shifted from the glory of the landscape surrounding and behind the scaenae to the glory and glamour of the scaenae frons itself. The scaenae started to become, throughout the Roman period, more complex and decorated.

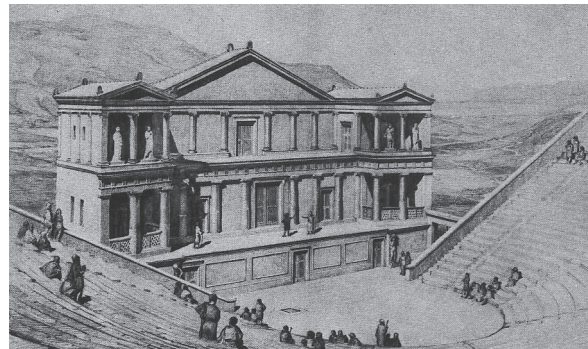


Figure 25. Theatre at Segesta,
(M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater*)

52 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 188.

Adding to this concept of fantasy and surprise were the introduction of curtains; the larger curtains, *aulaeum*, called for a trench right behind the front of the stage to lower into and the smaller, *siparia*, were drawn upward or off to the side to reveal a portion of the scaenae frons at some point during the performance.

Without the sentiment of religion tied to the theatre, the Roman theatre also became less site specific. Though some theatres settled on a hillside still, Romans introduced the idea of a grand façade above level ground. Architectural historian, Simon Tidworth describes a bit about this in his book, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History*.

By the end of the first century B.C., the typical Roman theatre was of stone and had the following characteristics distinguishing it from the Hellenistic: it was built on level ground in the centre of a city, the seats being raised on arches rather than cut into a slope; the scaenae frons rose to the full height of the auditorium and joined it at the sides, so that the whole space was enclosed and cut off from the outside world in a way that the Greek theatre was not; the audience entered from the back instead of coming in at orchestra level and walking up to their seats.⁵³

With the closing up of the theatre and size of the auditorium decreasing, it is clearly the next step to start restricting entrance. Social status was pronounced even more in the Roman theatres than the Greeks' and can be seen in a number of ways. Unlike the Greek theatre where audience and actors shared the main entrance through the open *parodi*, the Roman theatre further separated them providing several different entrances and a maze of passageways for different social classes. As shown earlier in (Figure 24), the orchestra became a seating area for high officials⁵⁴ instead of the chorus' playing field since they no longer had much or any presence in performances. An architectural element that ap-

⁵³ S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 25.

⁵⁴ C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 37. *The author claims that this area was for "members of the Senate and other officials."*

peared in the Roman theatre clearly showing social status separation was the parapet and passageway that separated the upper class in the first several tiers from the lower class who sat in the upper tiers;⁵⁵ this can be seen in the amphitheatre of Pompeii and theatre at Ostia (Figure 26 & 27).

Not to say that everything in Roman theatre had no practical reasoning. The roof on the scaenae is said to have been implemented for acoustical sake;⁵⁶ this is probably in part due to the fact that theatres were no longer backed up against the hillside that would have been a natural acoustical element. Although Bieber does not fail to mention that the roof also protected the siparia curtains and the expensive decorations of the scaenae frons.⁵⁷



Figure 26. Pompeii, amphitheatre
(<http://www.wired.com/thisdayintech/2009/08/0824-vesuvius-pompeii-pliny/>)

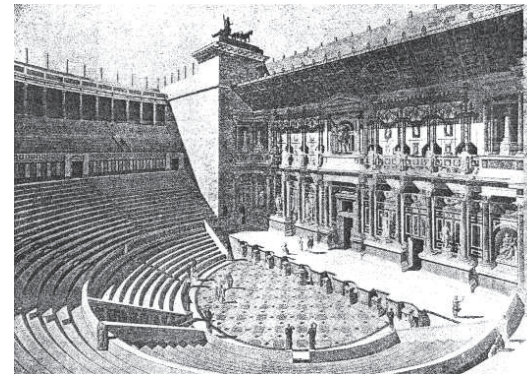


Figure 27. Theatre at Ostia
(H. d'Espouy, *Fragments d'Architecture Antique*)

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- 55 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 177.
56 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 180.
57 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 180

To reiterate, we should also recognize that the site choices had very much to do with the development of the façade. The site no longer having religious connotation simply needed to be “healthy” ones.⁵⁸ “The tendency of the Empire was to make everything bigger and better, more luxurious and more pretentious, but also more practical than the Greeks had made it.”⁵⁹ Recommended by Vitruvius in *The Ten Books on Architecture*, theatres tended to be oriented against Southern exposure to counter the heat that would be trapped in a curved enclosure otherwise.⁶⁰ Now with the site being able to be anywhere, the use of concrete furthered the architectural changes that occurred. “The construction of large and complex arches and vaulted passages was made possible by the copious use of concrete, seldom used by the Greeks.”⁶¹ The Greeks did not have to use much architectural interventions such as concrete since they used the natural landscape to shape their amphitheatre.

58 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 190. *Bieber uses the term “healthy” as Vitruvius had written in The Ten Books on Architecture, which she refers to throughout to explain the Roman theatres’ set-up.*

59 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 190.

60 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 190.

61 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 188.

Furthermore, the Romans created more spaces for the spectators beyond the auditorium within the structure, as described by Bieber:

Like the Greeks, they had colonnaded courts behind the scene building for the use of the spectators during intermissions, but they also had covered porticos on top of the cavea [the "seating" or auditorium space] which served as approaches to the uppermost gallery as well as to the sanctuary, and together with the vaulted corridors below the upper galleries served as refuge in case of rain.⁶²

62 M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 190.

To show the main differences between the Greek and Roman Theatres, Margaret Bieber explains it best in an interesting point by point chart.

The orchestra is a full circle.	The orchestra is a half circle.
Stage house and orchestra are separated.	Stage house and orchestra are brought into an architectural whole.
The stage is high and shallow.	The stage is low and deep.
The proskenion [proscenium] is decorated with columns and painted pinakes [pinax, panels].	The proscenium has a closed front decorated with niches and sometimes small pilasters.
The background of the stage has wide openings (thyromata) with painted scenery.	The background is a sumptuous architectural scaenae frons.
The entrances to the orchestra are open parodoi.	The side entrances are vaulted.
The seats of honor for the priests are in the lowest tier of seats.	Boxes (tribunalia) are above the vaulted entrances for the providers of the plays. Senators, members of the city council, and other distinguished spectators are seated in the orchestra.
The different tribes are separated in sections in the same gallery.	The different classes are seated in different galleries, separated by parapets (barriers).
Entrance for all spectators is through the paradoi and the orchestra leading to the radiating staircases.	Entrance for the public is through different outer vaulted entrances, staircases, vaulted and open passageways.
The auditorium is built against the hillside and therefore has no outside façade.	The auditorium occasionally is also laid on a hillside (Vitruvius, v,3,3), but mostly built on high substructions from level ground with a rich façade, a colonnaded gallery, and sometimes shrines on top.
No colonnade on top.	The theater can be built anywhere in a healthy place (Vitruvius, v,3,1). It sometimes has a shrine above its cavea.
The theater is built in sanctuaries.	The Roman theater is a class theater. It has more seats for officials and less space for the performances.
The Greek theatre is a religious and democratic building with equally good seats for everybody.	It has different seats for the different ranks of society.
The Greek performances are literary events.	The Roman performances are shows catering to the taste of the public.

Table 1. Contrast chart as given by Margarete Bieber in History of the Greek and Roman Theater. Notes from Vitruvius descriptions in his *De Architectura*.

(M. Bieber, *The History of The Greek and Roman Theater*)

liturgical plays: the church and the theatre

For some, this is better remembered as the “Dark Ages,” as some may claim that there was societal collapse during this time, nearly a millennium from the fifth century to the fifteenth century A.D. There was no doubt a major societal restructuring of some sort most in part due to the influence of religion—Christianity in this case of theatre. Theatre was considered “pagan” rituals as it was thought to encourage carnal desires and enjoyment; thus, there was not an incredible movement in theatre architecture or practice separate from the church. However, a few things are interesting to point out about how theatre’s role did change in this period due to the Christian influence.

The Christian Church, which had originally declared its hostility to the theater, eventually became its advocate and sponsor. This paradox repays study, not merely because of the enduring quality of the plays that the Church produced, but as an illustration of how deep-rooted the performing impulse is and how vigorously it resists any attempt to suppress it.⁶³

In regards to theatre as a practice, the Christian Church had used performance to illustrate Biblical stories and with it the values of the religion. One can imagine the incredible effect this had on those watching. Moreover, theatrical “re-enactment” of Biblical stories became tied to church liturgy. The Eucharist for example is a reenactment of the Last Supper which became such a powerful experience, it became a tradition practiced in the Catholic Church’s Mass. So powerful is this thing called performance, that a “reenactment” became a real happening in people’s minds. People can feel more empathy or feel more compelled to believe something if they can visualize it; also, to be then part of the reenactment as the Eucharist must only heighten empathy and any attachment to the story being relayed through performance.

63 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 111.

The Church at the time had a more open floor plan. There were no pews at that point, making it possible to create an elaborate setting for the performance starting with the sepulcher of Christ for the liturgical plays the Church started with.⁶⁴ Before long, there developed the following plans (Figure 28 & 29) after the plays moved directly outside the church, which had become too small a venue. What started out as rows of seats that were stations for the actors portraying Biblical characters became these canopies called mansions which actors entered and exited from; these mansions often symbolized locations of action. All the while, the grandeur of the church was the backdrop of the scene—similar to the first Greek theatres before the skene building blocked the direct view of the temple.

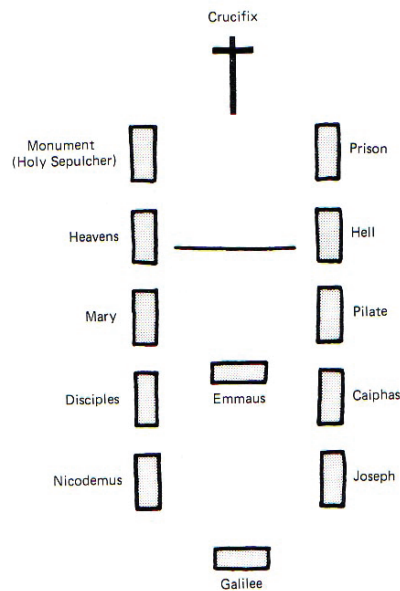


Figure 28. Early liturgical play layout of mansions
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

- (1) First door.
- (2) Hell.
- (3) Garden of Gethsemane.
- (4) Mount Olivet.
- (5) Second door.
- (6) Herod.
- (7) Pilate.
- (8) Pillar of scourging.
- (9) Pillar for cock.
- (10) Caiaphas.
- (11) Annas.
- (12) Last Supper.
- (13) Third door.
- (14) Cross.
- (15) Holy Sepulcher.
- (16) Heaven.

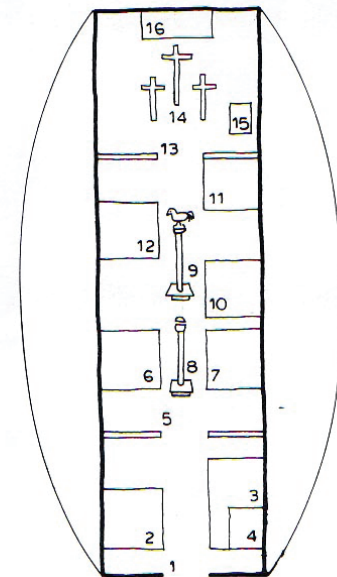


Figure 29. Later variation of mansion layout
(C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design*)

64 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 116. Arnott explains that there were no pews, or chancels, etc. to allow for free movement within the church; and that the alter, later sepulcher of Christ, naturally became the focal point as it was laid out centrally on the cruciform shape of the church.

Secondly, these reenacted Biblical stories were so effective in getting an emotional response, theatre was later to be used to spread the gospel—especially to the widespread illiterate population who could not read the Latin-based Bible. During the Hellenistic period, the Greeks too traveled their theatre as they conquered and spread; bringing with them simple construction material to erect a relatively crude form of theatre where they saw fit. So did the Romans in their time, for what they aptly called the circus since their entertainment of choice was sport and laid out in arena style. The difference here however was not to simply enjoy the theatre where they traveled to, but to use theatre as a tool to disseminate information to the greater public, to “educate” and to ultimately implant Christian beliefs into even the smallest, obscure niches of society.

Cycle plays became popular in the later part of the Middle Ages performing what they called *mysteries*; there was a double meaning of mysteries as one was in the religious sense, while the other was from the word *métier* as in an art or craft. These plays became popular gaining support of local communities to sponsor the organization and production of them. Guilds of the time in various reputable trades used these plays to showcase their talents; for example, bakers brought their loaves and carpenters showed their talents by building fancy edifices, which were once simple mansions of fabric and posts.

In more ways than one the cycle plays brought the Christian message home and made it comprehensible. They presented the Bible story not as some remote event taking place centuries ago and thousands of miles away but as vivid and contemporary.⁶⁵

65 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 122.

These biblical reenactments became an odd paradox of real versus illusion. "The demands of the plays created the need for permanent settings. Productions became increasingly sophisticated and elaborate. These stories were not passed on as mythologies or mere tales, they were expressed to have been actual events; yet, there were many things that they had to make abstract references to, such as heaven and hell or their God.

This play is still presentational theater, in that it involves the use of ritual language, suggestion, and symbolic gesture. And it fulfills one of the prime purposes of presentational theater, that of realizing the unrealizable: how can one realistically depict God? Impossible; we do not know what he looks like. But we can suggest him. At the same time there are individual moments of pure realism; and this mixture continues to characterize the plays that follow.⁶⁶

Although the theatre did nothing for architecture in the Middle Ages, it is worth looking at for the sake of understanding how theatre, the art, played such a big role in the culture of the time. It was a tradition and ritual that involved everyone and not just a select portion of the population; and it also meant different things to different people, such as the example of the tradesmen using performance events to showcase their trade and perpetuate their livelihood. Moreover, the lack of architecture is precisely what was interesting about this period. Having no permanent structure that would be viewed as the theatre says a couple of things: one, performances happened everywhere and anywhere, out in the open which made it much more accessible to the general public; second, with no fixed seating and such a large layout of the many mansions, the audience moved with the performance, engaged and involved.

66 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 118.

The following are a few images that depict what these religious drama performances may have been like.

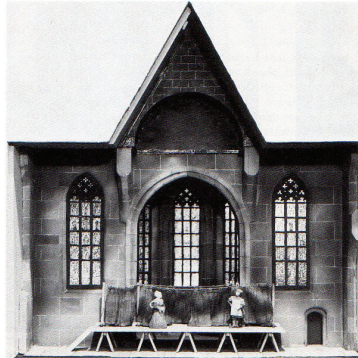


Figure 30. The Church as backdrop in simple platform stage performance
(P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction*)



Figure 31. Illustration of Passion play
(Cesare Molinari, *Theatre Through the Ages*)

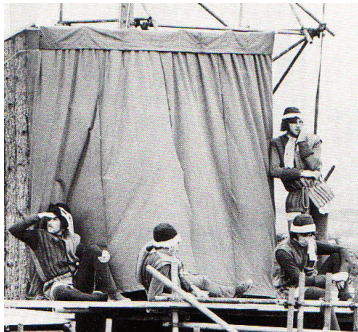


Figure 32. Modern interpretation of the old Cornish cycle, what a mansion may have looked like in earlier times (actors play four torturers)
(P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction*)



Figure 33. Illustration of mystery play staging
(Cesare Molinari, *Theatre Through the Ages*)

elizabethan playhouse

Theatre faced many adversities during this period. Theatre groups did not have the most stable position in society at the beginning of this period as it was still a very new profession. "By enrolling themselves in the household of a member of the aristocracy, however, they gained some measure of protection."⁶⁷ This was not necessarily the best thing for the profession—in acting or otherwise for the art was quite the controlled profession.

...the companies sought some measure of security by enrolling themselves in a noble household...Plays were censored and permitted only in an authorized text; theater licenses were compelled to pay sums to charity. And play could be forbidden entirely for what the authorities deemed 'adequate reason'.⁶⁸

As much as they amused the aristocrats and the Queen, there was a large portion of the public that had a great dislike for the trade⁶⁹. Faced with abhorrence by many, this must have had a great deal to do with the slow growth to a singular architectural typology of the theatre during this period in London. Between the rural areas paying theatre companies to leave and authorities harassing them at every opportunity, theatres found a home to finally settle in alongside the brothels in the red light district of Shoreditch.⁷⁰ This obviously did not put theatres in good light, but there it was.

67 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 157.

68 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 186.

69 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 187.

70 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 162-163.

As for where the Elizabethan Playhouse got its architectural form there a couple of precedents. Of the courtyard and balconies, there may have been a connection to the Inns that plays often were performed in; these Inns were homes to the first professional theatre companies.



Figure 34. Inns
(P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction*)

The banquet hall had also influenced the architecture of the Playhouse; it also influenced some uses of the space and the set up of the staging area. As described by Arnott, a long hall was set with tables down the length of it with a screen at one end separating the hall from the kitchen. A platform was typically set up before the screen and the regular access doors served as stage entrances. There was also, normally, a minstrel's gallery for musicians or for certain scenes to be played from above. This set-up is what was assumed to have been similar to the Playhouse.⁷¹

71 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 164. The author explains that much of what we know about the Elizabethan Playhouse is a synthesis of various bits of information as there were no real documentation of theatres (architectural) of the time. Most of what historians know have been gathered by visitors to London who may have described their experience of it or gathered by some texts within the playwrights' work themselves.

The size of the Playhouse was generally much smaller than those which we saw in the Greek or Roman theatres, averaging around 2,500 audience capacity.⁷² [As there was no electricity back then to offer light] the Playhouse held the action in the unroofed courtyard during the day. This may have been a major reason for the small turnouts for performances as most of those who could afford to attend were usually working at the time. "The more leisured classes would have had no problem attending, and at least a sprinkling of the nobility would usually be present."⁷³ Again we see a shift in the type of audience that theatre catered to, thus adding to the architectural response as well as the art. And though it may appear to have something in common with the Greek theatre in plan view, which used the concentric form to envelope the entire theatre to involve everyone in it with each other and their environment, the section truly expresses separation of audience to performance.

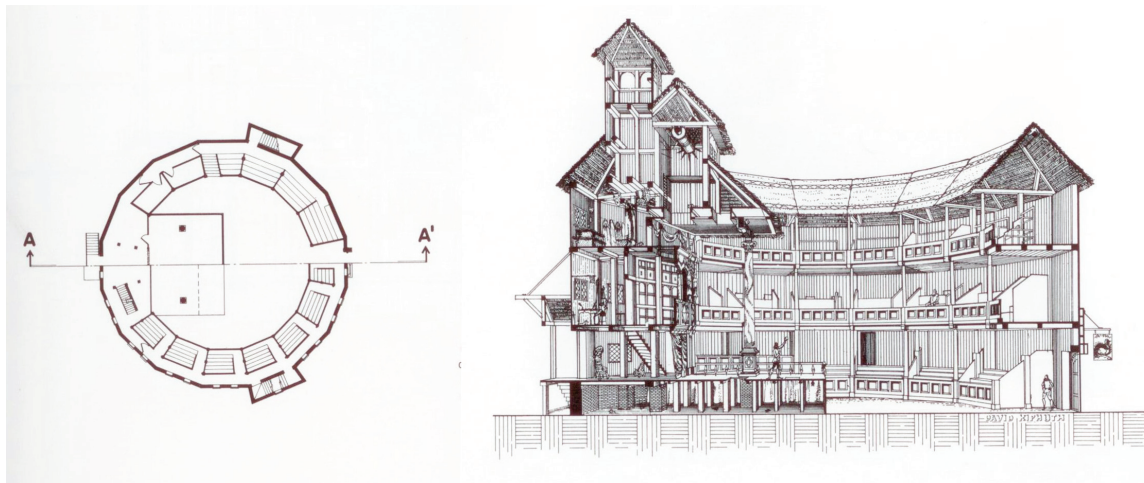


Figure 35. The Globe plan and section perspective
(G. Izenour, *Theater Design*, 176-177)

72 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 191.

73 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 191.

The upper balconies usually seated the upper class and may have had incredibly bad sightlines of the stage. The balcony above the stage area is speculated to have been for musicians, the minstrel's gallery. It is also possible to have accommodated very wealthy theatre goers that would have had a rear view of the performance; however, as Arnott points out, "...but there has always been a class of playgoer who attends the theater not to see but to be seen."⁷⁴

Unmistakably, we see a few things at work here that affected the theatre. One, lacking the support of the community as we have noticed in previous times, the Elizabethan Playhouse did not change much in architecture throughout the period—and I don't believe that the separation of religion itself was necessarily the cause, rather the detachment of ritual. There is also no real evidence to say that there were much elaborate schemes or machinery that affected theatrical performance—not that there were none; but, on a positive note, the art of theatre became much more about the spoken word again instead of tricks of the backstage that took away from the individual's imagination. William Shakespeare's work shows this in many of his plays where environment is merely suggested and not painted so clearly. On the downside, the architecture that came out of this era was driven by aristocrats who wanted distance and separation from those that were, literally, beneath them. It must also be noted that enclosing the space kept the theatre to be available to only a portion of the public; it also did not offer itself to be accepted by many as these playhouses sat alongside brothels.

74 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 170.

italian renaissance and baroque theatre

What came out of the Baroque period that still has significant influence on modern large orthodox theatres are the Italian opera houses that came out of this time. Theatres such as the Teatro alla Scala in Milan were influential in shaping great theatres across Europe, such as the famous Drury Lane of England during the Restoration period in the 18th century. In studying the opera house, we can see influences of the Elizabethan playhouse as well as theatres sprung from the Italian Renaissance period—mainly Teatro Farnese, Parma.

Stepping away from liturgical drama of the Middle Ages, the Italian Renaissance looked to revive Roman ideals in theatre, with Vitruvius' writings as their main source for inspiration and understanding of the traditional architecture. Architect Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico (Figure 37 & 38) is the most exemplary of attempting Roman revival. Painted perspective scenery were behind the doorways of the scaenae frons, imitating streetscapes that converged to the stage which was to then be understood as the piazza.⁷⁵ Unlike the traditional Roman theatre however, these painted scenery were behind doorways that led to very deep cavities going further backstage. Another difference is seen in the more elliptical shaped audience seating as opposed to the half-circle auditorium of the traditional Roman theatre.

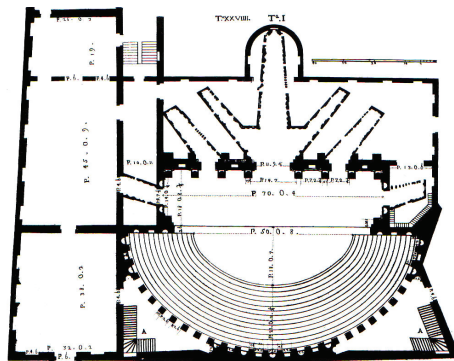


Figure 36. Teatro Olimpico, plan view
(O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre*, 171)

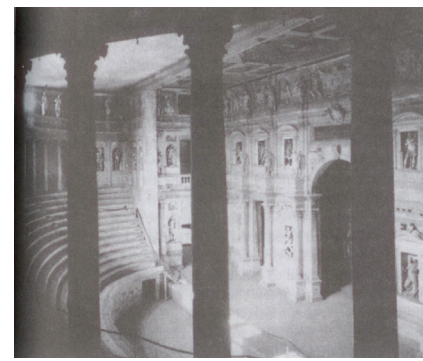


Figure 37. Teatro Olimpico, interior
(O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre*, 171)

75 O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 171.

Although the Teatro Olimpico was thought to be an exceptional example of Roman theatre revival, it was not long before it was abandoned.⁷⁶ The most influential of theatres from the Renaissance that has the closest connection to those of the Baroque and beyond is the Teatro Farnese, Parma (*Figure 38 & 39*). It is in the Teatro Farnese that the proscenium has matured to the form that we recognize it to be today.⁷⁷

Any or all of these practices may have contributed to the proscenium arch, which was adopted to fill a need first clearly felt in the Renaissance. In the medieval theatre, Heaven, Hell, and Earth were shown simultaneously, since space was treated as unbounded and infinite. Contrarily, Renaissance artist sought to depict only objects that could be seen from one fixed point...Because space was now treated as finite, a framing device was needed to restrict the view of the audience. The proscenium arch, then, helped both to create the illusion of reality and to mask the mechanisms upon which it depended.⁷⁸

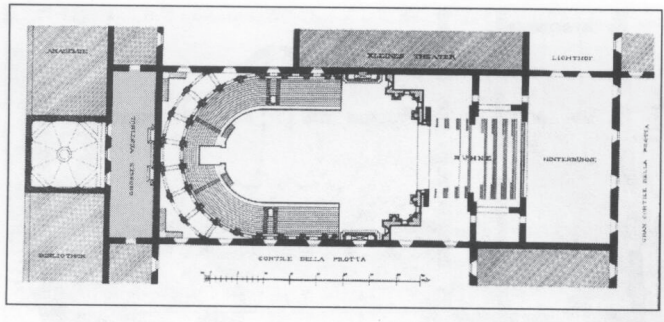


Figure 38. Teatro Farnese, Parma, plan
(O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre*, 172)

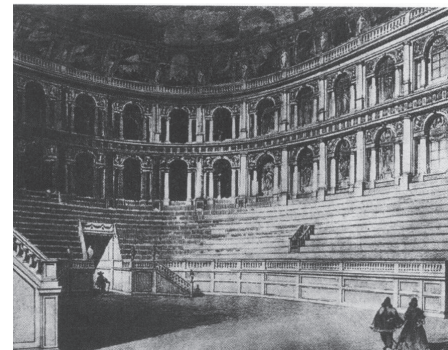


Figure 39. Teatro Farnese, Parma, interior
(O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre*, 172)

- 76 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 60.
77 C. Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 60.
78 O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 172.

The development of the proscenium had risen the expectation of fantasy from the audience. “The proscenium arch is the most characteristic device of the representational theater. It induces the feeling that the audience is watching a moving picture of a slice of the real world. It further induces the convention that, so far as the performers are concerned, the audience does not exist.”⁷⁹ The proscenium curtain eventually became a given in theatre here and also added to the masking of illusion, heightening the magic of unveiling of a fantasy world behind it. Another interesting architectural element introduced in the Teatro Farnes is the U-shape auditorium seating which may have influenced the horse-shoe shape in the baroque theatres such as the Teatro alla Scala opera house in Milan. Opera houses such as these in turn had influenced theatres like Drury Lane. It is also evident that theatres of the baroque period had borrowed some architecture of the Elizabethan playhouse. A typical feature of these opera houses used what the English called boxes (reminiscent of the Roman *cavae*) which sat privileged audience members above the stage and auditorium space.

What cannot go unnoticed here in the baroque theatre is the use of machinery which became much more sophisticated by this time; and this machinery was able to become more sophisticated because of the theatre turning completely indoors.

Finally, an important change during the baroque period was the bringing of the theater indoors...During the baroque period, the three problems outlined here — bigger audiences, enlarged stages, and more sophisticated technical equipment — could never have been solved without a roof to cover all the functions of the theater.⁸⁰

79 P. Arnott, *The Theatre In Its Time: An Introduction* (Canada: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1981), 217.

80 C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 71.

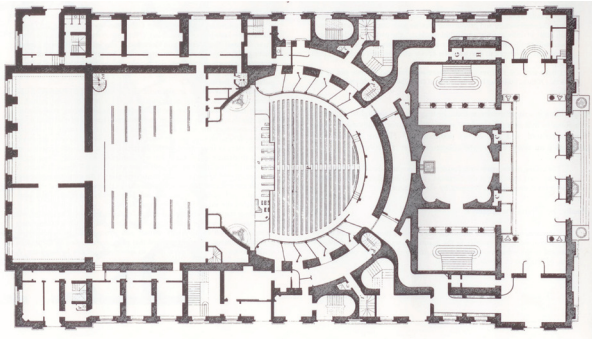


Figure 40. Drury Lane, plan
(G. Izenour. *Theater Design*)

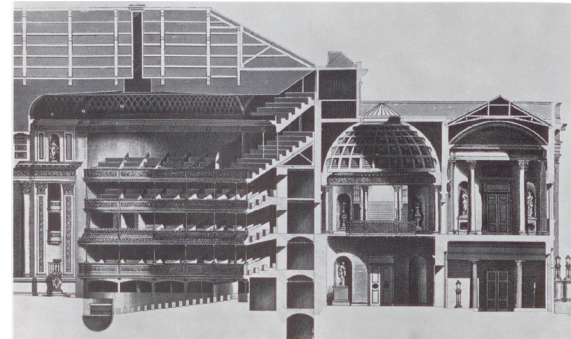


Figure 41. Drury Lane, section model
(G. Izenour. *Theater Design*)

These machines along with the stage design increasingly made the stage look more realistic and began steering away from the simple symbolic kind of purpose they had before with tools like the *mechané*, *periakti*, or the *eccyclema*. As the theatre closed itself off to the outside world the more they tried to imitate it on stage. There were perspective views imitating a realistic place created by these shrinking arched wings behind the proscenium, and independent pieces that moved with the help of machines such as pieces of canvas painted to look like moving clouds.⁸¹ Bringing the theatre indoors had propelled the innovation of technology in the theatre into the future, rapidly advancing later in the 19th century.⁸²

81 O. Brockett et al., *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 174.

82 C. Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater: Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983), 103.

conclusion

There is a history repeating itself throughout these theatres. There is this change in expectation of the audience from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, through the Baroque period which was a similar transition that occurred between the Greek to the Roman period. In both these situations, the theatre was used as part of a tradition or ritual, inclusive of the larger public; the focus was the story being told—stories of mysterious gods performed to relate to the audience and engage them into believing. Eventually, theatre took the role of entertainment, a privileged piece of culture limited to a few. The Romans and the audience of the Renaissance and Baroque period wanted “real” identifiable characters portrayed in “realistic” settings. Ironically enough, these plays that portrayed the more everyday identifiable characters were staged in a more fantasy-like way.

What changed perception and what altered interaction within the past theatres are of most concern. What made the Greek theatre was that they engaged the audience, speaking directly to them at times. The openness of it allowed everyone to see and acknowledge each other, engaged in each other’s presence; the lack of physical boundaries also made people aware of the exterior environment, separating place and performance, and separating fantasy from reality. Once it started closing up as it did in the Greco-Roman and throughout the Roman Republic and Empire, the theatre began to separate audience from reality; the enclosure then led to a separation between audience members as well.

Though the religion had much to do with theatre (in terms of performance), what can be taken as a valuable lesson from its success was the way it was accessible to everyone. These mystery plays were so successful because these performances went to people instead of asking people to come to it.

To summarize graphically what can be observed in the past theatres, the following diagrams are to illustrate three things: engagement or interaction, movement, and boundaries. These diagrams are a study of how social characteristics are affected by boundaries in theatre; and vice versa, these boundaries can then affect social characteristics. To show a more comprehensive comparison/contrast between all theatres studied, diagrams of the Environmental theatre has been included in the following.

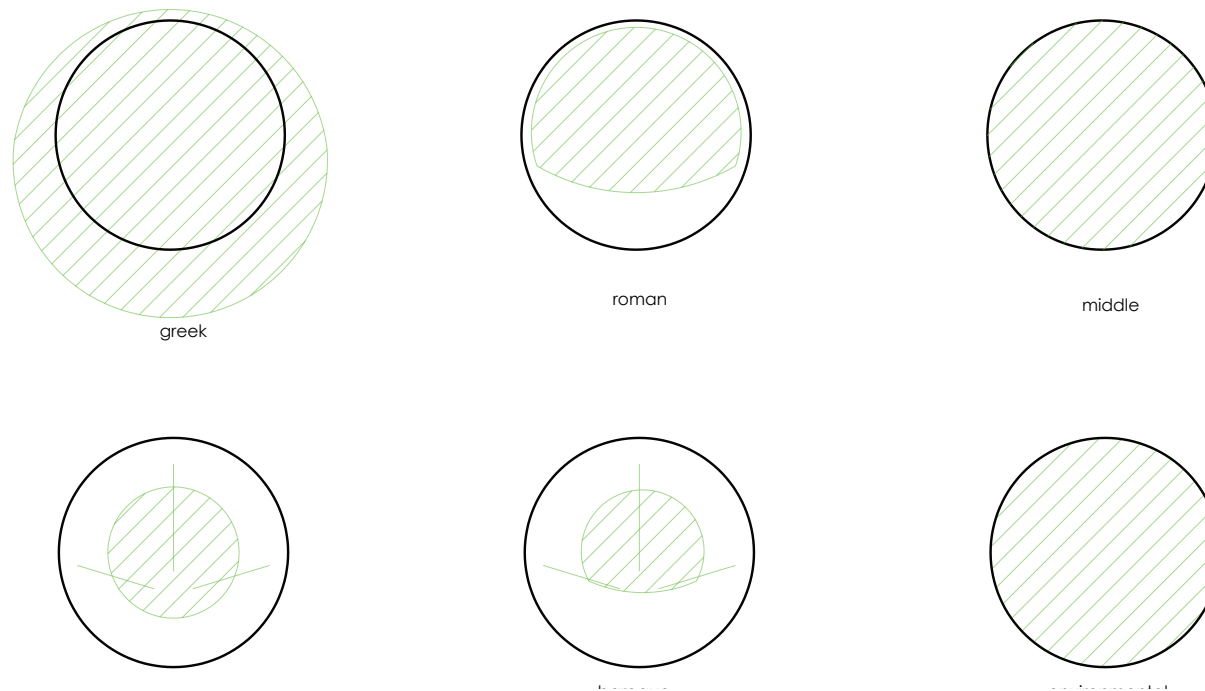


Figure 42. Diagram: *Engagement*

The circular form represents the space and is not directly depicting any shape, form or size of the actual theatre). The green hatch lines represents how engaged the audience is with the actors—direct interaction or lack there of. The white space is where engagement/interaction is not at all possible due to

physical boundaries such as the elevated proscenium stage or the "boxes" for example in the elizabethan period. The green arrows crossing the boundary of the hatch lines represents audience's sporadic engagement when they see fit, and that the engagement for the most part is unreciprocated.

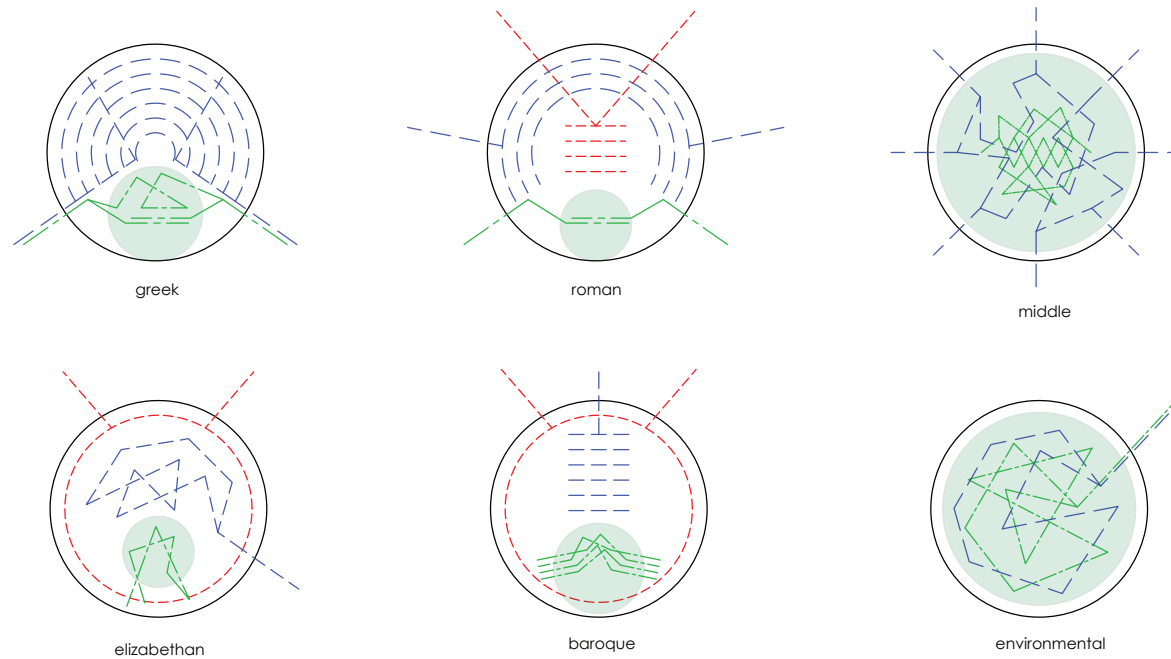


Figure 43. Diagram: *Movement*

Again the circular boundary is only representative of the space and not a depiction of the actual theatre shape, form or size. The green dashed lines refer to the actors' movements; the blue dashed to the average audience member; and the red dashed lines represent the privileged audience member's typical movement. The movement is basically describing how they move in the space with the architecture as part of the influence. The green shaded spots represents the area of performance—thus, shedding light on how people's movements differ in each period in relationship to the "stage."

Note that the Environmental theatre and the plays of the Middle Ages had a lot of movement in shared spaces between actors and audience as the entire "theatre" asked for the audience members to move and join the performance.

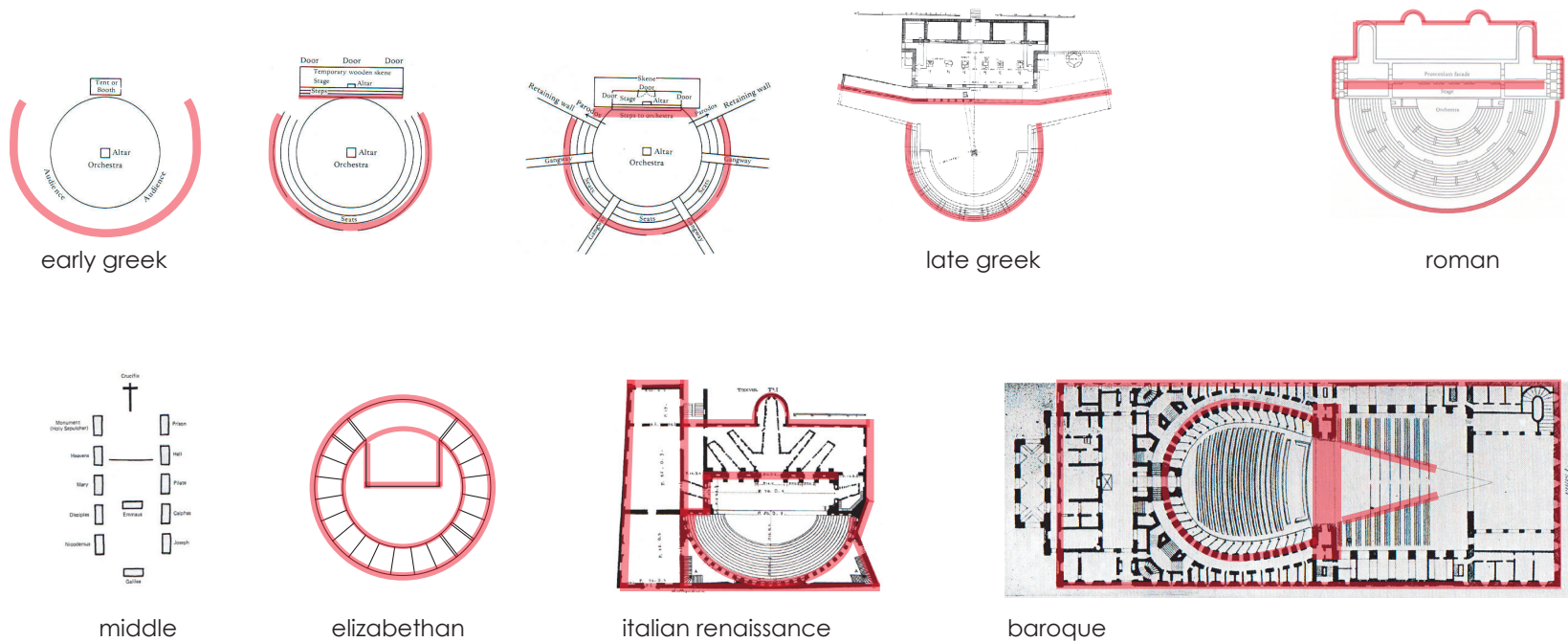


Figure 44. Diagram: Boundaries

Here the theatres are shown in plan view; the idea was to take note of how the boundaries (shown in red) developed and further jarred the exterior from the interior and the audience from the stage, hence the performance, by various means.

In case of the Greek theatres, prior to the Theatre fo Eretria (under late Greek) the boundaries were attributed to the natural landscape—the hillside.

Starting from the late Greek period, the boundaries begin to not only tighten up around the auditorium but they also start to show in forms of [permanent] architecture.

The Middle Ages mystery plays appear to have been out in the open in general. [Most illustrations I have come across in the research has shown a vast outdoor set up for these plays.]

Beginning in the Elizabethan period, note that the boundaries start multiplying and layering. The Baroque theatre has the most severe boundaries as they are not only layered by distanced by larger privespaces.

experimental theatre

political theatre

Experimental theatre was often used as a method to inform the general public on social-political issues in all parts of the world and in various points in history. More recently, Brazilian politician, theatre director and writer Augusto Boal used theatre to empower the poor and other oppressed groups.

Inspired by the writings and teachings of fellow countryman Paulo Freire, and his own experiences with dramatic performances, Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal developed Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), an international movement to use theater as a vehicle of participatory social change.⁸³

Experimental theatre tends to be a poor man's theatre as it has minimal costs for production, without fancy costumes or set design. In Boal's method of participatory performance, theatre was truly a venue for cathartic experience for the poor and oppressed. "The key to Boal's theater is the "spect-actor," an audience member who is invited onstage to take part in the drama. Working mostly in poor communities, Boal serves as a facilitator to help volunteers create dramas around problems that affect their lives," writes Ken Gewertz of the Harvard News Office.⁸⁴

At the time Boal started using this method, there was an extremely oppressive socio-political situation in Brazil as it was under military regime. This military regime had seen Boal's method as a threat and exiled him in 1971, keeping him outside of the country for the next 15 years—his method of bringing people into the performance was that powerful and influential. He stirred up the audience emotionally by getting them physically involved. The idea was to empower the audience by asking them to practice the change instead of imagining it.

83 Singhal, Arvind. Empowering the Oppressed through Participatory Theatre. [http://ciruelo.uninorte.edu.co/pdf/invest_desarrollo/12-1/empowering_the_opressed.pdf]

84 Harvard Gazette: Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. [<http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/12.11/15-boal.html>]

Before Boal, there was Bertolt Brecht who was very influential in the practice of theatre of the 20th century using theatre as a medium to increase political and social awareness. Although socio-politically driven like Boal, Brecht differed - his method had to do with keeping the audience from getting too emotional. By doing this, he believed there was more potential to think about what was happening. In reference to theatre scenic design and architecture, this meant the space simplified straying away from *naturalism* as much as possible; and as for the performance, the characters and their speech were also made abstract.

Bertolt Brecht's main concern was to engage the audiences' minds through the performance and have them think critically about greater socio-political issues, motivating them to positive action. His form of experimental theatre ran counter to the usual 'naturalist' theatre which espoused creating environments that made the audience truly believe they were watching something that was real and set in the actual time and place. His concept of 'alienation' or 'distancing effect' functioned so that the audience was not brought into a fantasy reality, but was 'alienated' or 'distanced' from the actual drama. They could still be entertained and enjoy the performance, but yet still be challenged to think critically about the story.

happenings

Found in the late 50s,⁸⁵ Happenings is an interesting type of theatre performance to look at because it is not necessarily about what you are watching, it is about circumstance and chance, much like life. There was also something about Happenings that caused the passing viewer to become aware of their environment. There was no need for a theatre. Much like street performance, a “found environment” was used.

Happenings and their successor styles made it respectable to stop and watch a building being constructed and to think of that activity as a performance; or to introduce dialogue into dance and well-crafted whole-body movements in theatre; or to see under the meaning of actions for action's rhythms, patterns, and repetitions...as a pattern of behavior, as a collaboration between human beings and the other beings that inhabit the planet, even beings inanimate, artificial, and imaginary.⁸⁶

Happenings were sometimes on the edge on becoming an Environmental type of theatre (which will be discussed further later) where the environment can affect the action or the perception of the action. One show brought audience members to a roof top of a building. And on other roof tops there were other dancers dancing to a sequence. Audience members would walk around rooftop to see different performances. This engaged a specific audience (in buildings higher than roof top or at same level, those below or on street level could not see the performance).⁸⁷

85 B. McNamara et al., *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 3.

86 B. McNamara et al., *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 26.

87 B. McNamara et al., *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 6.

Happenings, however, were often directed by those from an art background rather than theatre. Thus, the environment was not necessarily their focus of design; the focus, rather, was about simply the reaction to the action. This type of artistic expression however had an influence on the following Environmental Theatre movement in which found environments were crucial; this is not because the environment was necessarily an important part of the performance, but because it could be and at the same time, it did not have to do anything with the performance either.

environmental theatre

social revolution and its affect on theatre

In the world of theatre, there was a movement to break tradition and conformity of the orthodox theatre. There was also an urge to break away from the naturalism that still existed in theatre. During the Great Depression, naturalism continued in the theatre to cater to the audience that wanted to forget the real world. Over the years, the Federal government in the U.S. funded theatre—similar to what was seen in the Elizabethan era, we may again suspect that theatre was restricted in some shape or form.

It is not known exactly how, when or who invented the black box theatre, although it is suspected to have ties to the Environmental Theatre movement of the 60s and 70s in New York. People were questioning authority, political conservatism, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and other social political issues. As they were fighting for rights for the oppressed, counterculturists were ultimately aiming to find greater individual freedom. Part of this individual freedom was exercised through expressing oneself openly without justification or inhibition. This expression of the individual then broke boundaries between people as surface qualities were dismissed.

There was a rise of social, environmental, and political consciousness and the orthodox theatre was reminiscent of restriction at the time. During this time [60s-70s], theatre groups were re-evaluating the role of the audience and performers. There was a desire to allow the audience to play an active role, becoming a part of the performance. Intimacy went hand-in-hand with this idea of melting the audience into the performance, hence the smaller space.

The proscenium in orthodox theatre was seen as a definitive boundary that separated audience and performance, thus removed in order to have a more intimate engagement between the two parties. There came the desire for a more

simplified way of designing the scene; elaborate, naturalistic scenography was no longer needed or wanted for this style of intimate theatre. Here, there was no illusion of reality or realization of fantasy through stage design, trickery of lights, or other backstage contraptions found behind the proscenium in orthodox theatre.

The Environmental theatre was also heavily influenced by the Happenings, as the Performance Group was incredibly interested in the idea of a found audience much like street performance.⁸⁸ The Performance Group at the Garage often had the performance bleed out onto the street.



Figure 44. Performers at the Garage entrance about to step out onto street at the end of *Dionysus of 69*
(B. McNamara, et al., *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects*)

88 B. McNamara et al., *Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), 3.

discovering spaces and creating "environments"

The first scenic principle of environmental theater is to create and use whole spaces. Literally spheres of spaces, spaces within spaces, spaces which contain, or envelop, or relate, or touch all the areas where the audience is and/or the performers perform. All the spaces are actively involved in all the aspects of the performance.⁸⁹

The space was designed in a very abstract way. This is completely opposite to what the traditional proscenium theatre did at the time with grand scenography to create an illusion of a very specific place and time. This method of minimal scenic design was crucial in redirecting the focus and expectations of performance and audience, respectively. The focus was to be about how the story unfolded due to the audience's participation, while the expectation to be a silent observer being fed a fantasy and illusion was diminished.

Simultaneously, the scenic design involved the whole theatre. Everyone, spectators and performers were in a single scenic environment. No one was in a different type of space, unlike the orthodox theatre where Schechner points out, "In the orthodox theatre, scenery is segregated; it exists only in that part of the space where the performance is played."⁹⁰

89 R. Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (Applause Theatre & Cinema Books: New York, NY, 1973), 2.

90 R. Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (Applause Theatre & Cinema Books: New York, NY, 1973), xxx.

in re-inventing the black box

examining the black box

Have you ever thought how stupid the proscenium theater is architecturally? Start with the auditorium, the “house.” A silly name for row after row of regularly arranged seats—little properties that spectators rent for a few hours. Nothing here of the freedom of arrangement in a house where people live—and can push the furniture around. And most of the places in the ‘house’ are disadvantageous for seeing or hearing....⁹¹

Schechner may criticize the architecture of the orthodox theatre, but it suits its purpose—it is that way because it was meant for a certain kind of performance, which in many cases may be more than difficult to adapt to a smaller venue. Having said that, there is a reason why the black box may have the most potential for change in architecture and practice. Orthodox theatres are set, permanent structures, and its performance type are only as flexible as its architecture can allow for; the black box theatres on the other hand are small enough to alter and experiment with without losing sight of the greater art.

From what I have observed, at least here in Hawaii, there are some of the same types of boundaries in the black box that are present in large orthodox theaters. The proscenium itself can often be a boundary; though when possible, directors will have actors and/or audience members cross it.

Intimacy is more attainable in the black box theatre, not just due to its size and close proximity of actor and audience, but with the removal of the proscenium. Intimacy is an emotional as well as physical involvement. Someone may understand the emotion of the performance by observing an actor's facial expression, but feeling that emotion can be intensified by greater involvement between actor and audience. Actors are not challenged either when the faces of

91 R. Schechner, 31.

the audience members are engulfed in darkness. This level of emotional intimacy is what the proscenium or delineated stage hinders, and perhaps has also been lost to the black box; in the black box however, what hinders involvement is not as simple as a proscenium, rather it is about what our trained notion is about performance, theatre, or entertainment in general.

Instinctively, somehow our idea of the theatre already recognizes that there is a defined, separate seating area for the audience and a stage for the performance. The black box's roots of Environmental Theatre expressed a concern for this delineation to be broken down, but the separation between audience and performance still remains in concept.

Perhaps it is the seat—due to the cost of production or maintenance of the space. To account for cost of production, theatres sell tickets to the show. A part of the ticket cost then is the promise of a reserved spot, the seat. The seat suggests comfort and security, physically and psychologically. It is also an inherent characteristic of a seat to be stationary; inadvertently, these seats then begin to outline “performance spaces.” As a result, the occupant of the seat becomes merely a voyeur; the seat may even act as a boundary on the micro scale, inhibiting participation to the degree of even suppressing the expression of a reaction openly. Perhaps the staying power of the typical theatre seating arrangement is simply because of our undying preconceived notion of what happens in a theatre as Dr. Kaplan had expressed: the actors perform on stage and entertain the anxious, yet still observers.

As much as the architecture can accommodate an occupant's needs, sometimes the architecture can manipulate the use of space. Sometimes, the architecture can cause unforeseen changes in thought and perception of the space. In the case of the black box, this became a hidden, underground theatre culture. In the original black box, the idea was to break down boundaries between immediate audience and performance. What I believe to be an unfortunate outcome is the social and physical boundary that the black box has created for itself. The black box is almost always

hidden from the public; unless sought after, it would not be noticed or found.

Regarding theatre then entails more than just looking at this theatre, it requires a poetics which will allow political and ethical judgements to be made. If judgement is to be possible it is no longer sufficient to say how one knows what is real, but how one knows what one is seeing and experiencing and its relation to reality. At a time when seeing has become believing it is worth reminding theatre that its responsibility is still to disrupt, not to acquiesce with this spectacle.⁹²

The black box may have originally started with the intention of separating illusion from the performance; however, it seems to have become an alternate world in itself, enabling its own form of packaged illusion. Back in environmental theatre, nothing was hidden about the space architecturally. If we say that illusion can be realized by shutting out reality, then there is no difference it seems between what the orthodox proscenium theatre did to what the black box is doing now; the same aspects of space and distance, both emotionally and psychologically, are still established in similar parameters, with the only difference being the magnitude of the audience and size of the theatrical setting.

There is this inaccessibility of black boxes as many of them are quite hidden. In academic institutions for example, black boxes (or lab theatres) tend to be rooms within the larger theatre building with hardly any indication that it exists. Maybe the size of the lab theatre in itself makes it very easy to tuck it away within the larger theatre. The Earl Ernst Lab Theatre and the lab theatres within Leeward Community College are examples of this situation. It has its obvious benefits and reasons for being situated this way, but nevertheless, quite unknown and hidden from non-theatre goers.

92 A. Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life : An Ethics of Performance* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1995), 54.

Thus the architecture and the respective conceptions of space and distance have many social implications for both orthodox and black box theatre. There is an exclusivity that is implied in both the black box and large theatre attractions even though they are quite different. The black box implies exclusivity to an underground culture and in contrast, the large theatre productions often attract the mainstream.

When a new form of drama, with a different physical setting, took the place of the old, the relationship between audience and event was re-established in a new way. At present, the theatre finds itself in a strange half-way position, anxious to preserve the repertory of the past, searching for new conventions, trying to decide what kind of architecture, if any, is suited to its needs, hankering after the ritual of earlier periods but unable to break free from the demands of entertainment.⁹³

The Re-Invented Black Box is to be a mobile and transformable place that is environmentally conscious, active in its pre-existing environment, and conducive to human interaction. To build something that is temporary and mobile addresses the concern to counter the nature of the individual that is becoming more comfortable in its own personal space.

93 S. Tidworth, *Theatres: An Architectural and Cultural History* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 8.

The following diagrams express what the re-invented black box theatre should be in concept. The architecture should allow for more freedom in movement, capable of allowing as many entrances needed or wanted to be placed in various locations fitting for each play and site. The architecture should allow for interaction within and beyond the theatre space. Finally, the architecture should have porous exterior boundaries to allow people inside to be cognizant of the exterior and to also be seen itself to the people outside of the theatre as well—and these boundaries should only exist as necessary; some site may require more shelter than others from outside elements.

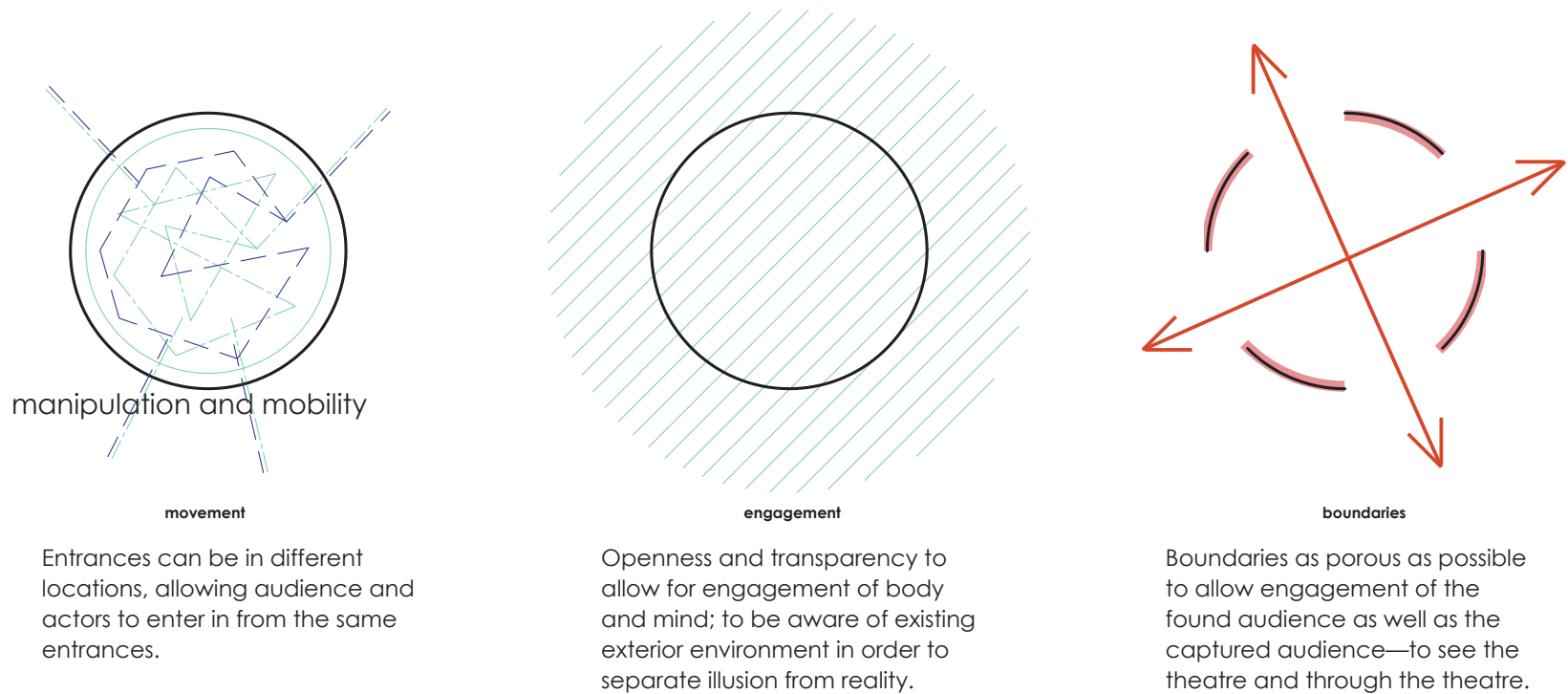


Figure 45. Diagram of the Re-Invented Black Box

With the possibility of it being erected in the middle of a public plaza (such as Tamarind Park) or a familiar park that everyone frequents (such as Ala Moana), it lends itself to be noticed by the larger public—a public that may not know of its existence nor the capability of being truly entertaining. [Throughout the course of writing this document and talking about it with others, almost all of them did not know that black box theatres existed in Hawaii, much less knew what it was all to begin with.] Black box, in its nature of being small, cannot afford for massive productions or expensive advertisements. Perhaps its visibility as it transports and its construction can be its own advertisement.

As it was with Happenings, the drama of it under construction can also be a kind of performance. Mobility also offers accessibility, reaching suburban or even rural areas for those people distant from the city. This will introduce theatre to areas where theatres may be scarce but still find an audience.

As the Romans and Greeks have done in their time, they brought their theatre with them as they traveled. With them, they brought culture, a tradition, and architecture. Today, technology speeds things up. We are often mobile in a car, biking, running to appointments—unless sought after, people may not notice small black box theatres. This project is to go to the audience instead of simply waiting for the audience to come to it. The idea is to erect these theatres, in whatever configuration that suits the purpose of the performance, in various sites suited for enhancing the play's scenic design. In some cases, scenic design may hardly be necessary as in the case of *“Waiting for Godot”* which is discussed and designed for in this project.

Another goal for this play in regards to its mobility is its ability to change the energy or memories of a given site to an audience member. With such a globalized world we live in today, site specific art installations have such an impact—bringing a new idea to a different place. The Contemporary Museum (TCM) in Honolulu has showcased many site specific art installations that can change a visitor's memory of that place forever; this change of perspective and memory of a place can be exponential when interacting with the “art” or the theatre in this case. The following image is of an

installation done at TCM in 2003 by artist, Patrick Dougherty. Walking into a human-size cocoon made of tree saplings can be a different experience as opposed to simply looking at a piece of art from a distance—there are more senses stimulated in the experience of being in one of these cocoons. This theatre is to make use of different sense stimuli to change perspective, experience and memories of its audience and performers.



Figure 46. Na Hale O Waiawi
(Patrick Dougherty, *The Contemporary Museum*)

transparency — authenticity of experience

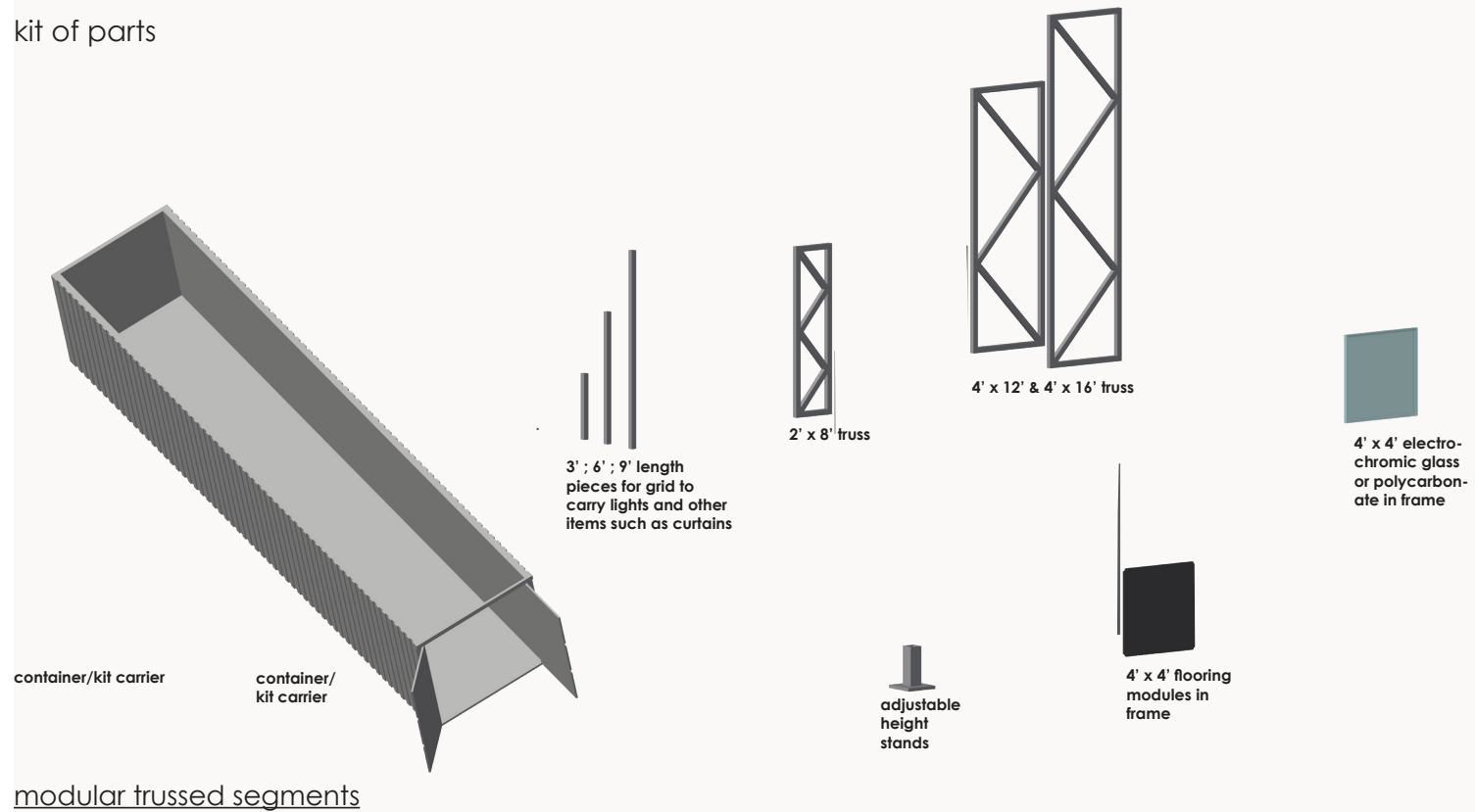
In the re-invented black box, the idea of transparency will be a method to diminish illusion by making reality more apparent; it no longer has to be a box or black and void of what exists in real space. If the outside world was not shut out, what would that mean to the experience of the theatre? The audience as well as performers can have an experience of real time and place, genuine and unique; an experience in which is directly tied to an actual environment rather than a reproduction of one as we see in film.

The idea of transparency can allow the black box to be more approachable and cause interest in the average passer-by. Where environmental theatre discovered a way to break the boundary between immediate audience and performance, the reinvented box can break the boundary between the larger public and theatre in general. It will not be like the monumental orthodox theatre or the secretive black box or lab theatres. Breaking the boundary between public and theatre offers more accessibility. Accessibility then counters the idea of exclusivity of a particular audience.

It would also challenge the imagination of the audience by removing some of the mystery of scenic design and backstage machinery. It will challenge the mind to focus on what is happening in the play and of the story itself.

There are to be three major elements of this mobile theatre. This kit of parts will include: the container, modular trussed segments, and modular cover pieces that can be floor, wall, ceiling, and possibly seating. The idea of containers and scaffolding expresses some level of temporariness and mobility.

kit of parts



At the beginning of design, the scaffold was the inspiration for these modular trussed segments. The scaffold was ideal for its temporary characteristic; it was something to represent the brief moment in time that a live performance exists in space and place. Conceptually, scaffolding is recognizable as a temporary structure anywhere in the world. Images of scaffolding that were used in theatre have even been painted on ancient Greek ceramic kraters. Scaffolding is used even in the most traditional rituals of the Vanuatu called the Naghol (N'gol), where young and adult males bungee jump from up to 8 stories high and graze the dirt below as to bless the earth, offering the possibility of sacrifice.⁹⁴

Scaffolding is also symbolic of the spectacle that theatre-goers seek and experiences, but modest at the same time for being simply recognizable and for its reference to impermanence.

Pragmatically, these segments make sense due to the ease of set up and disassembling. Quick and ease of labor is ideal as this theatre is not meant to be grand in expense or appearance and has the potential to move about for one single production to different locations. Being trussed, it is naturally capable of carrying heavier loads which is another added benefit in case the producer of an event wanted to put up something a little larger.

94 <http://news.softpedia.com/news/The-Land-Diving-Ritual-37949.shtml>

containers

Containers are interesting objects as they symbolize the globalized world we live in today. They also symbolize something of this type of theatre—the impermanence of its contents and the lasting of the shell. They are one of the few objects I can think of that does not have a distinct cultural reference, making it neutral and yet universal. There is no haughty pretension about the container; there is only the notion that it is filled with goods temporarily.

As of 2005, some 18 million total containers make over 200 million trips per year.⁹⁵

Containers are often discarded, left to be used for other random purposes. Many containers are left at docks after being stripped of the goods they came with. There are often not enough goods that can be shipped out in the same container to go back where it was exported from. It is cheaper to buy another container at the place of export than shipping back an empty container, leaving a large surplus of empty containers at the place of import. Because of this large surplus, alternative methods and use of them have found its way in architecture.

The use of containers for this project is not only useful for the purpose of transporting the kit of theatre parts, but they also can serve as a usable architectural space. Using containers architecturally is nothing new and has been used before for various types of occupancy and scale. Some have used a single unit for an office, and as it is strong structurally and modular in size, some architects have designed stacked containers for multiple story homes. Recently, Travelodge had opened a 120-room hotel constructed of 86 stacked containers in Uxbridge, England.⁹⁶

95 Levinson, Marc. *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*

96 Uxbridge Travelodge, Buro Happold, world architecture news, architecture jobs. [http://www.worldarchitecturenews.com/index.php?fuseaction=wanappln.projectview&upload_id=10217] Nov. 23, 2010.

floor ceiling wall

Although it would be ideal to have a single modular piece that can fit all wall, floor and ceiling, for the nature of this Re-Invented Theatre, there will be separate pieces appropriate for each function in order to give it the most flexibility as possible. The following shall be removeable, placed in pre-fabricated aluminum frames.

1. The Floor: 4' x 4' modules

2. The Ceiling: 4' x 4' modules

3. The Walls: 4' x 4' modules

type a) Electrochromic glass—able to be transparent when off and opaque when charged with electricity.

type b) Opaque polycarbonate material

type c) Translucent polycarbonate material

type d) Transparent polycarbonate material

[type 'b,' 'c' and 'd' for its lightweight characteristic, as opposed to the heavy weight of type 'a,' where opacity or transparency of wall is constant and pre-determined]

the plays

Waiting for Godot (a tragicomedy in two acts) by Samuel Beckett

The play consists basically of 4 characters; opening the act is Vladimir and Estragon who await a man named Godot to no avail in both acts. Vladimir and Estragon are two simple men waiting to ask Godot questions in hopes to give them answers that will help them. No one is ever explicit about what exactly it is they want to see Godot about or who he even is. Two characters by the name of Pozzo and Lucky enter and exit once in each act of the play; and the only other character to appear for only moments at the end of each act is a boy that is supposed to be Godot's messenger.

Waiting for Godot is chosen for the simplicity of the setting. The setting is lightly suggested in Samuel Beckett's play, as the characters only require a tree and a mound of some sort for sitting. Vladimir and Estragon do not necessarily ever leave the set, where Pozzo and Lucky does twice, as does the boy. The tree in Act I is talked about as looking dead by Estragon and Vladimir; and in Act II, Vladimir exclaims that there are leaves on the tree. The simplicity of the scene may make the site seem irrelevant, however I propose that the simplistic set can be more interesting against the natural state of the environment the theatre is placed in. Also, this play is set in the day which give it a nice opportunity to set up the theatre with little or no lighting for the interior.

The possible sites chosen for this play are Magic Island Beach Park and Moanalua Gardens. Though the play typically calls for a desolate atmosphere, I chose these site to give an example how the play can be interpreted differently. Maybe the lush parks that I chose is to juxtapose what is implied in the play to make it seem more absurd as it would appear that Estragon and Vladimir would be more hopelessly waiting for Godot when you can see that everything looks all right. Then we can put change our perception that this desolateness they feel is about them is all in their minds.

site: Magic Island—Ala Moana Beach Park, in open field



Figure 47 . Magic Island
(Google Earth image)

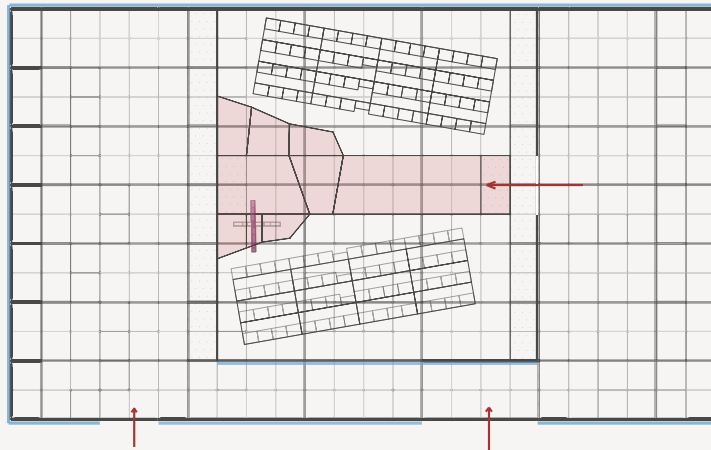


Figure 48. Possible floor plan with set and removeable risers and seating
(stage in pink, possible entrances noted with red arrows.)

Magic Island was chosen for the different views out to either the horizon, the open park, or to the pier of small boats. All implying movement and breadth of world which Estragon and Vladimir are oblivious to. Here, the set calls for a fake tree to juxtapose against the real.

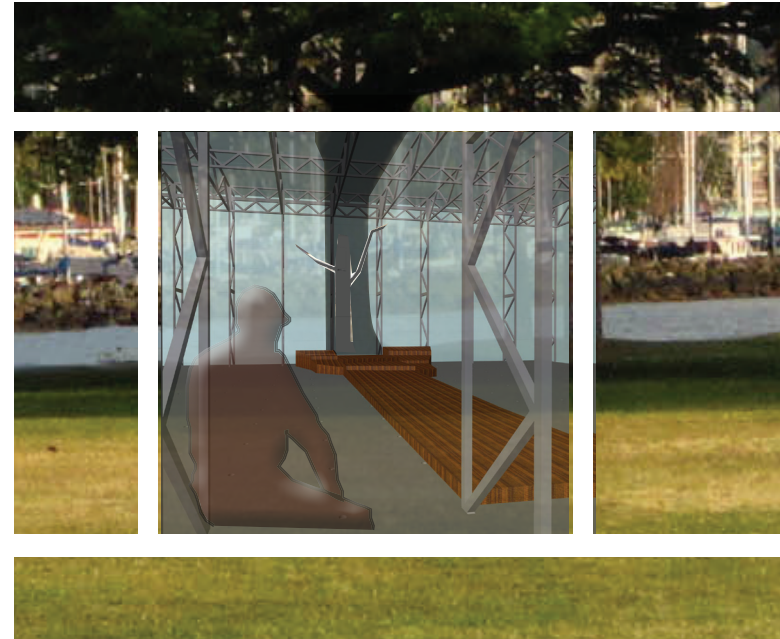


Figure 49. Perspective
(East view towards tree)

site: Magic Island—Ala Moana Beach Park, in open field



Figure 50 . Interior, two possible ways to frame landscape with electrochromic glass
(view towards south, set shown with actors)

site: Moanalua Gardens, under monkey pod tree next to freeway

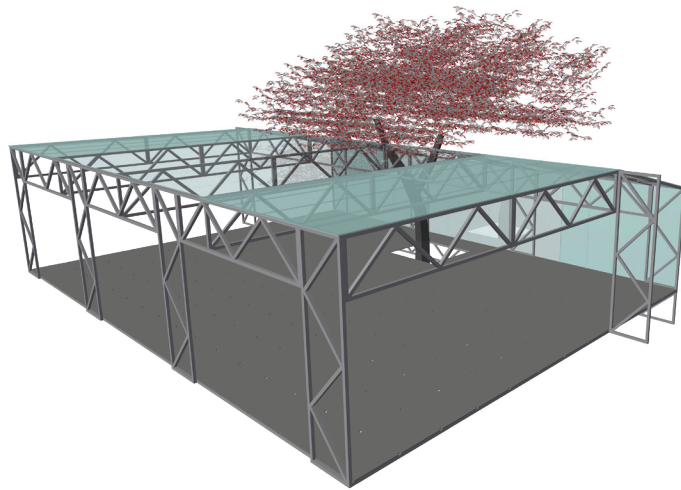


Figure 52. Overall perspective
(view towards south)

Differing from the Magic Island example, this possible theatre set uses a real tree. In Act II, as the electrochromic glass becomes transparent revealing the leaves and the freeway behind it—to give a "life passing you by" kind of feel to the play where Estragon and Vladimir is constantly waiting in vain.

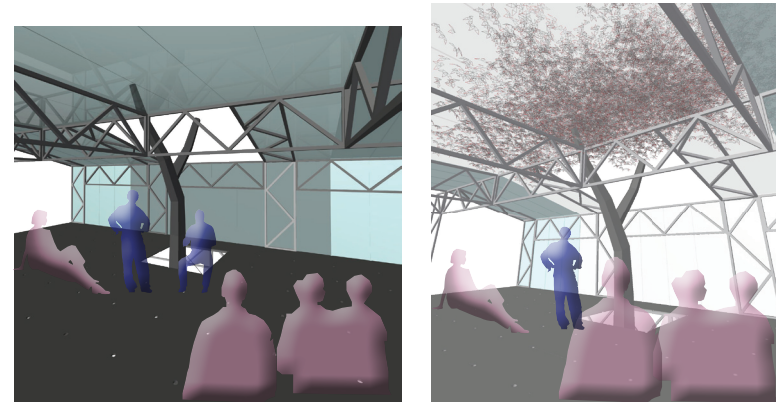


Figure 53 . Interior
(view towards southwest: left, only tree trunk visible in Act I with electrochromic glass turned on opaque; right, tree leaves visible in Act II when glass turns off to become transparent)



Figure 55. Interior, real tree in middle of theatre as it would be seen in Act II
(view towards southwest / tree through, behind, and above theatre; moanalua freeway behind)

the play

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

The play has a few important scenic settings: the play begins at the exterior of the palace grounds where the ghost of Hamlet's father shows itself in front of watchmen; another scene is inside the palace; and the last dominant stage setting is at the graveyard. The play may be brought into a more modern urban setting as castle may become high rise or other building; and the play can have a very simple solution to the scenic design despite the several scene changes. The use of the electrochromic glass can be very useful in this situation as it can take the scene from outdoors to indoors easily without really stepping outside of the theatre.

The following sites were chosen for Hamlet due to such scenic implications just stated above. Tamarind Park was interesting as it gives an interesting atmosphere with low mounds of grass and long reflection pools. With the plaza spaces being a bit short in span and the reflection pools being fairly low in height, it would be interesting to see the theatre raised, stemming out from these water features. There are two towers on adjacent sides of the park, Pauahi Tower on the North end would be a perfect setting to be framed to imply the castle. As Hamlet is thought to be mad, I imagine him wandering about the park in some scenes before entering the theatre for his speaking parts.

As for the TCM, the short parapet wall between the main entrance's courtyard and the open lawn below would be a wonderful staging area for the theatre. The courtyard at the entrance would already be the stage. With an approximate 5 foot drop to the open lawn, the theatre can be set up as a simple bleacher type seating fronting the parapet wall.

site: Tamarind Park, middle of plaza



Figure 56. Tamarind Park, downtown Honolulu
(Google Earth image)

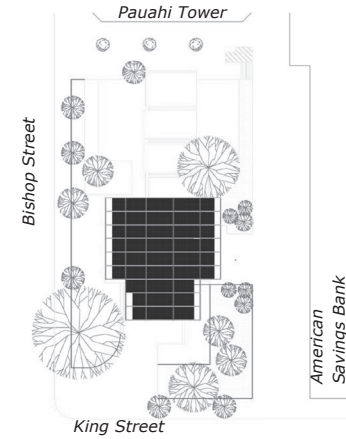


Figure 57. Tamarind Park, downtown Honolulu
(detailed plan view)

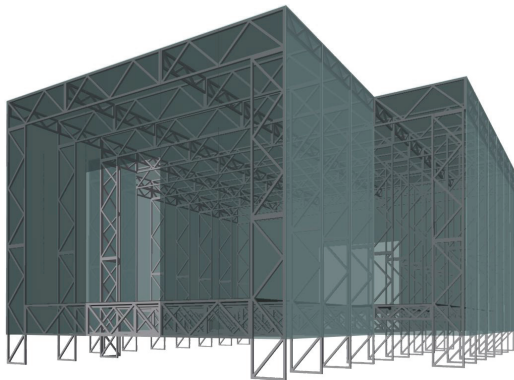


Figure 58 . Overall perspective
(view towards bishop street)

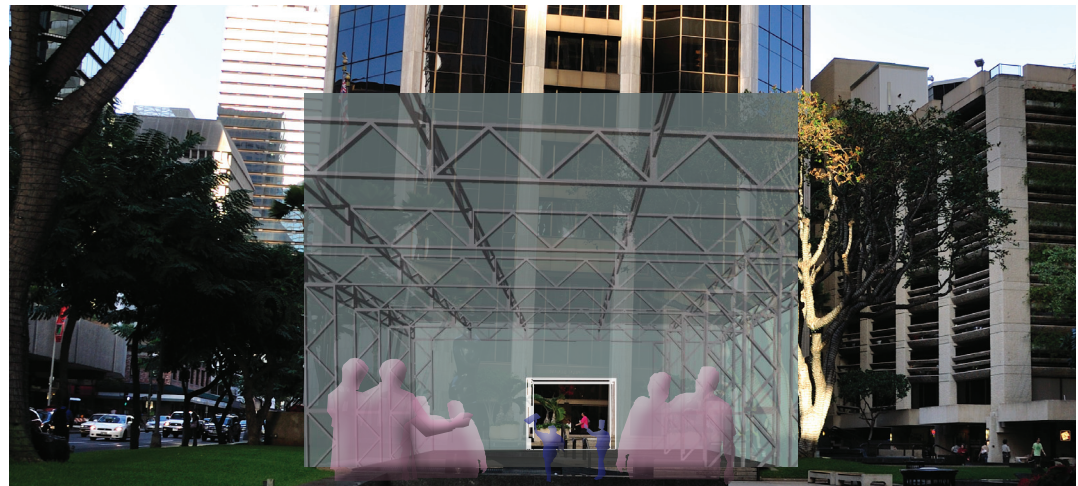


Figure 59 . Overall perspective
(view towards northeast, Pauahi Tower)

site: The Contemporary Museum (TCM), grassy area directly behind main entrance lobby



Figure 60. The Contemporary Museum
(Google Earth image)

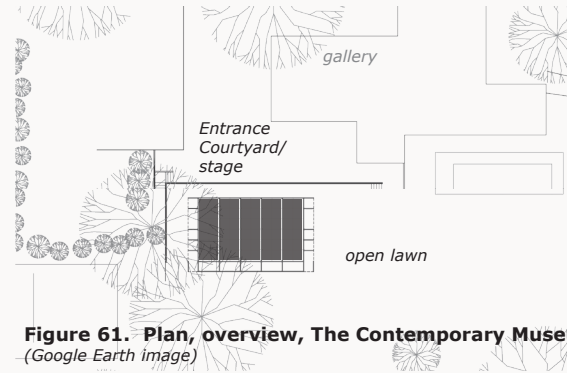


Figure 61. Plan, overview, The Contemporary Museum
(Google Earth image)

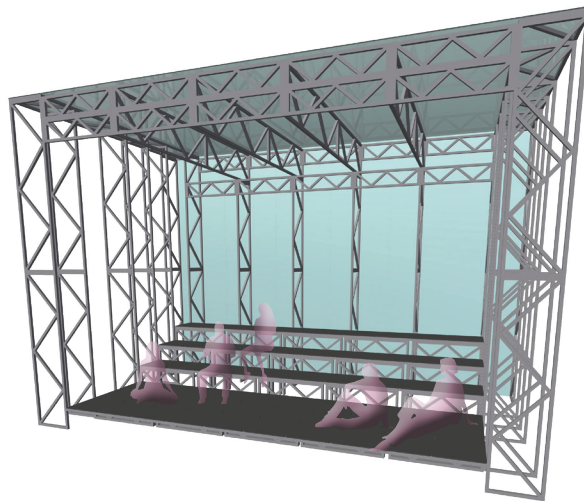


Figure 62. Overall perspective
(view towards audience seating)



Figure 63. Perspective
(view towards west, photo skewed)

The seating would sit parallel to the entrance courtyard above behind the parapet wall; the courtyard being the main stage area.

The previous may only be the start of what this theatre can turn into within the context of the site and the requirements of the respective plays. The black box theatre we know now has the freedom to be creative and start imagination from an empty space, which can be rich in experience in a certain way but the scenic design may not connect with the entire audience—this may be simply due to unfamiliarity of the text or context of the play. The Re-Invented Black Box theatre makes an attempt to engage and have a relationship with the modern person, relating a fictional created story to a familiar place or object.

One point to reiterate here is that using existing sites as part of the theatre experience can enrich or change the perception of the site and play of the theatre goer and performers.

After the method of construction and delivery of the theatre's kit of parts to each site can be understood as feasible, the following are some other possibilities where the Re-Invented Black Box could be utilized in regards to the type of play and its scenic requirements.

- A play such as "The Tempest" by Shakespeare perhaps can be put up at a waterfront using the natural sounds and smells of the ocean. Take Kakaako Waterfront Park for instance, where part of the stage can be the rock wall itself and scaffolding can be cantilevered out to the water to extend the stage, and the ocean would be the performance's backdrop.
- Take the parking lot as a possible site, where cars can become the lighting instruments for a musical like "Grease" by Warren Casey and Jim Jacob. The scaffolding can be made a large concert-like stage and on the ground level cars can also become part of the performance. It could possibly be watched like an old drive in movie where people still sit in their cars and plug in to an AM radio station for sound.

- “Big River” by William Hauptman, based on Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* could be played over water such as a stream or pond; or it could be set on top of a body of water like a river. The scaffolding can be used to set the stage as well as the audience seating across the water—provided feasible to cross over the body of water. On a large body of [still] water, the theatre could sit on a barge with simple seating arrangement fixed bleacher style as it does in the example give above at TCM. It could also be set so that the audience would sit at the bank of the river or stream on the grass.
- Perhaps a Greek play such as “Oedipus the King” could be set up in the foreground of the Washington Reflecting Pool in D.C. with either the Washington Monument or the Lincoln Memorial as the backdrop. It may need only a simple seating arrangement here with scaffold towers for lights if to be performed at night—though, the scaffolding could also be used to frame the view of the monuments. Greek plays, in homage to their style of theatre, could also be set in a site similar to the hillsides as they had once did. The Re-Invented Black Box would then be merely a stage or made to be an abstract palace with the audience sitting along the hilside; this would be a way to take the audience outside of the box again.

Having given these options, if it were possible, this theatre could go to extreme sites such as a lava field. With this theatre, site conditions and theatre configurations have many options to change or enhance the play—no longer having to be confined to crafts, construction and art to imitate what could be or should be a real thing as it does in the black box.

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